Chrome Shelled Regios Volume20

source : http://www.baka-tsuki.org/project/index.php?title=Chrome_Shelled_Regios:Volume20

These are novel illustrations that were included in volume 20

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鋼殻のレギオス20
デザイア・リポート
雨木シュウスケ
F

9784829137482
ISBN978-4-8291-3748-2
C0193 ¥580E
定価：本体580円（税別）
富士見書房
19201930058O6

鋼殻のレギオス20
デザイア・リポート

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だけど彼女はちょっぴり——いやとても、変わってる。

学園都市ツェルニの話題をさらう彼女。メイシェンのケーキ屋で働いていて、入学後告白された人数すでに推定7人。彼女曰く、

「告白された全ての男性とお付き合いをしているつもりです」

つまり七股。

「しかしながら、恋愛に関する嗜好書を読んでみても、恋愛感情というものが理解できません」

つまり、変人。ツェルニ一ズレた、彼女の隠された秘密とは!?

レイフォンを超える逸材変人現る!?
『週刊ルッカン』大スクープ!!
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イラスト：深遊
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9784829137482

ISBN978-4-8291-3748-2
C0193 ¥580E

定価：本体580円（税別）

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「さぁ、今宵も哀れな挑戦者が現れた！」

鋼殻のレギオス

CHROME SHELLED REGIOS

20 デザイア・リポート

「心とはなんでしょう？」

彼女の視線を追って、空を見た。月があった

――ヴァニティ・レン

彼女はなにものなのか？

ランティカは最高だぞ

永遠に変わらないぞ

思うままだぞ

バージョンアップするぞ

現実の女なんかに
見向きしてんじゃねえよ

With Interview

The first-year male student in front of her was a kouhai to Mifi. The schools opening ceremony had ended not long ago, and the boy who showed an uncomfortable expression in his stiff, unwrinkled uniform seemed very pure.

Moreover, there were many such people next to her.

Yes, this was a place in the school buildings where many first-year classrooms were located.

An area that Mifi had always come to not long ago.

These new patrons of the area made Mifi a bit strange, but she put these feelings in the back of her mind and continued asking questions.

"Uh, she's the classmate you're talking about?"

"Right right, it's her."

The kouhai showed some suspicion, or perhaps a reaction to a topic he didn't like, but he still reluctantly spoke.

Her - what he meant was a beautiful girl who had become a hot topic among the new first-years.

Her name was Vati Len.

She worked in the the store that Mifi's childhood friend Meishen had opened, so Mifi knew she was a beautiful girl, and she also felt that this girl was weird, but hadn't thought that she would have created such a fuss.

"Then, I heard that there were seven people in total, is that true? "

"Ah - I heard that there were about that many, but I don't know how many people there actually were."

"Meaning that you have some first-hand information?"

"I know three of their names."

"Including you?"

"Ah, that's right."

The kouhai's expression became bitter.

Mifi's interview seemed not to make him unhappy. No, maybe he had felt unhappy since the beginning, but those feelings had slowly changed.

Was it because his unrequited love had already calmed down that he felt interest? Or was it because this girl was a hot topic, so he had confessed partly as a joke?

Ah, that kind of situation was also possible. Who could get the most talked-about person - maybe guys confessed with that kind of attitude of playing around.

Mifi didn't believe it was a bad thing.

Those kinds of actions made great trouble for the girl, but Mifi felt that not only could doing that make the class atmosphere sizzle, it was also very interesting. Though Meishen or Naruki would would have a completely opposite opinion.

However, that noticeable girl had rejected the confession attacks of the male students with full potential total annihilation. Just that was already very interesting.

But, with only that, Mifi wouldn't have deliberately come here to interview.

The interesting part was her methods of rejection.

"Then, how were you rejected?"

"Uh~ Me? I....."

After an ashamed pause, the boy began explaining.....

"Uh, how should I put it? It should probably fine if I explain, right?"

"Nn, go ahead."

The male students she had interviewed until now all had that response, so Mifi had long since gotten used to this kouhai's attitude. She quickly invited him to continue talking.

"She asked many questions, questions like 'what part of me do you like'."

"Nnnnnn."

"When it had just started, I thought - Ah, this person is too narcissistic, I even felt she was very irritating. But, afterwards I gradually felt that maybe things weren't as I had thought."

"What does that mean?"

"Because she kept asking without stopping. How am I different from other girls, how large are other people in the bust category, who's this and that in the waist category~ And not only did she ask what was different between her and other people, she even talked about me."

Judging from your hobbies, I'm not in your strike zone. In that case, why did you choose me?

Among the female students you look at in the classroom, you look at XX the most. However, comparing her and I, I believe that there are quite few similarities between the two of us. What reason is there for that?

Like those kinds of questions.

Nn, Mifi understood that not only was that annoying, but also quite fearful. She had experienced that feeling.

"So you escaped?"

"I escaped, isn't that a natural response? I confessed three minutes ago, but why did she keep talking about other people? It's almost a horror film."

"Hmm."

Mifi felt that the he was somewhat right.

Moreover, all of the guys she had interviewed so far had said similar things.

She also understood the talkative moods of these kouhai. In the beginning, they had been resentful because they had been made to think of those scary memories, but as it went on they felt that since they already thought of it, might as well straightforwardly talk about all of their fears - things were definitely like that.

After all, the guys she had interviewed until now had all made that kind of response.

As for why she would use that kind of method to reject, that was what Mifi was interested in. Though Mifif had interviewed those guys, the doubts in her heart hadn't been resolved at all.

"As expected, I guess I can only ask the person in question herself now."

Mifi thought this.

Taking action immediately after being confident in an idea was Mifi's strength.

"That's how things are, can I interview her?"

It was the dining area of Meishen's store. Though Meishen and Vati were working, Mifi still interrupted.

"Okay, since we have no customers right now anyway."

Because of the location, there weren't many customers who came here directly to buy, so Mifi easily got Meishen's approval. Since Meishen had responded, of course Mifi easily got Vati's agreement.

"That's what's going on, thanks for the help!"

"No problem, please go ahead."

Vati had an indifferent expression that she had never changed since Mifi had first seen her, but Psychokinesists were basically all like that, so Mifi had long since been used to that kind of attitude.

Unconcerned, she began asking bluntly:

"Uh, the reason I came here today was to interview Vati-san for her story."

"Story means.....?"

"Well, the story of why you struck down the male classmates who confessed to you one after another....."

"What does that mean?"

Mifi had planned on continuing without beating around the bush, and though she had those thoughts, the atmosphere of the interview suddenly became strange.

"Huh..... weren't there people who confessed to you?"

"yes, there were."

"I already interviewed those people, so this time I wanted to hear what Vati-san had to say."

"I see, you wanted to collect data."

"Ah, nn. Don't look at me like that, I'm also an editor of a magazine."

"I see."

"Uh, then can I ask you some things?"

"Yes. If it's convenient, please allow me to ask a few questions after the interview."

"Sure."

"Then please begin."

Vati quietly sat on the table. Her posture seemed quite pretty, but she didn't give off the narcissistic presence that the kouhai had spoken about.

No, maybe it had simply been a misunderstanding.

In that case, what was the terror that the kouhai had experienced afterwards?

Could the interview this time clear up that mystery? Mifi carefully but forcefully raised a question:

"It seems that there were many people who confessed to you, but do you not have any guy that you like?"

"I don't understand the definition of 'like'."

"Simply put, it's the desire to have go out with someone."

"So you mean someone qualified to engage in reproductive behavior with?"

Cough cough!

An exaggerated sound came from behind her.

Turning around, she could only see Meishen coughing violently in front of the cake shelf.

No, if Meishen hadn't made that response first, Mifi would definitely have become like that.

"......Ah, it might be like that described with the most extreme wording. But before going to that level, I first wanted to talk about topics related to a maiden's feelings."

"What does 'maiden's feelings' mean?"

"Eh?"

"I looked at some love-related manga, but I still don't really understand."

"By don't really understand, you mean..... Huh?"

"I noticed after reading those manga - and men are also the same in this regard - a prerequisite is that the other male party have good looks, and though there are differences in their reactions and normal attitudes, generally they all have selfless personalities and sacrifice for others, and usually are also very empathetic."

"Uh, nn."

"Regarding the third part of being empathetic, I can understand, considering that it's a priority to ensure the survival of one's genetic factors, but I cannot understand the two earlier items. People's preferences will be strongly impacted by the prevailing culture, so it cannot be generalized, but according to the current prevailing culture, most are able to reproduce regardless of their outer appearance."

"Uh - Yeah..... that's right."

"In that case, appearance isn't actually that important. Of course , it's not ethically accepted to artificially change one's appearance, and people need a flexible mind and medical technology to be able to change their appearance to suit the other gender."

"Uh..... Nn..... Yeah."

"Also, regarding the second item, a quiet and selfless personality. I don't understand why sometimes people hold unchanging feelings for someone, yet there exists a contradiction in their expression. In particular, females will express an attitude of dislike, but when their target person is about to leave, they exhibit contrasting behavior of wanting him to stay."

Vati had even chosen a specific case..

"Ah, aah..... that's- how should I explain, it should be shyness, right?"

Mifi struggled to reply underneath that inquiring gaze.

"Shyness? I see....."

But what was unexpected was that Vati straightforwardly accepted that answer.

"Those kinds of disorderly symptoms break out in order to let the mind gradually prepare to become suitable for procreation? Just like a rebellious phase."

"What do you mean break out, it's not an illness. Uh, but, ah- If you compare it to a rebellious phase, maybe you could call it a youthful phase."

"Youthful phase. Right, it's a youthful phase. I see. If a rebellious phase is a preparatory phase for the mind to become ready to leave the parents and become independent, a youthful phase is a preparatory phase for procreative activity with the opposite gender, is that right?"

"Uh, that..... Nn, I think, it should be, like that?"

She had lost- Mifi felt impatient.

She had completely lost her momentum.

Mifi had felt that Vati was a strange person, and had prepared her heart for it, but hadn't thought that she would be strange to this degree.

Mifi believed that if even Meishen was able to cope with it, that meant Vati was a good person at heart - maybe that way of thinking had made her underestimate Vati.

Maybe she had underestimated the other party. So that was it, Mifi understood.

She understood the feelings of the guys.

This kind of feeling was indeed terror.

It gave them a feeling of being unable to communicate with the other party using words.

A kind of terrified feeling that she was clearly dealing with a human, but she wasn't speaking to a human.

However, Mifi couldn't retreat at this critical juncture.

She had come here to interview.

Mifi was a reporter.

"I see....."

"Uh, so about my question just now....."

"Right, you just asked me whether there were any guys that I liked."

"Nn, right, right."

Mifi felt that she had regained her position, making her relax a bit.

However, her thoughts were too naive.

"But, I never noticed anything about myself sufficient to make them like me. And more importantly, everyone seems to have mistaken something."

"Huh?"

"I never rejected their confessions even once."

"Huhh? Ah!"

If she said that- Mifi thought of it. Of the guys Mifi had interviewed, every one had said that they had run away because they couldn't take Vati's bombardment of questions.

No one had been told the words 'I refuse' by Vati.

Of course, probably none of them had obtained Vati's acceptance, but-

"Huh? But you didn't give them an answer either, right?"

"No, I accepted the confession, but they had to let me ask several questions..... I should have told all of them something like that."

"Huhhhhhhhhhhh?!"

"That's how it was, I planned on going out with all of the guys who confessed to me, but....."

"Uh, no one thinks like that."

"Really? Then I should resolve that misunderstanding."

Vati who naturally said that kind of outrageous remark threw Mifi's mind into chaos.

Huh? What did that mean? She wanted to have go out with everyone?

Though she didn't know what the guys thought, at the least Vati thought this way. In other words, she believed she could have went out with all of the guys?

"Because I believe that I should properly experience dating between a man and woman once."

She said that kind of thing.

The person who described dating between a man and a woman as simple reproductive behavior said such a thing.

"No, you can't do that!"

Mifi couldn't help but cry out.

After that, all of the time Meishen had agreed to for Mifi's interview was used for her to convince Vati, and even that wasn't enough time, so Mifi took up more of Vati's working time.

"......Then, they no longer plan on going out with me?"

"Nn, that's definitely it. That's definitely correct, so you should give up this time."

"Understood."

Mifi had immediately noticed that it was an impossible task to instill a sense of virtue and the concept of subtle interactions between men and women into Vati's head, so she decided to tell her that those guys had already backed off.

But, with only that, Mifi worried about how things would turn out.

Though Mifi worried, she was at her limits today from various angles. That was true for both Vati's working time and the physical strength of Mifi and Meishen.

"Guaah, I never would have thought she would be that kind of girl."

After the working time ended, Vati returned to her room. In the store after the metal shutters had been pulled down, Mifi sprawled on the table, exhausted.

"She completely surpassed my imagination."

"She surprised me too."

Meishen also sighed.

"But I have a question."

"Nn? What?"

Mifi raised her head, and could only see Meishen showing a somewhat dissatisfied expression.

"You always tell me to go, go, but you told Vati she couldn't."

"......Do you want me to tell you to join in on a seven-person nighttime orgy?"

"No..... that's not what I meant!"

Meishen's face flushed red in an instant, and that response made Mifi naturally relax.

There were many profound areas of male-female interactions. Mifi felt that Vati seemed to had taught her something - which was that when one revealed the truth easily, it could let everything become barefaced and vulgar.

So, the red-faced Meishen made Mifi feel at peace. The lovestruck her who had imagined a many-person fantasy made Mifi feel at peace.

Did she feel at peace because she also longed for something of that level? [1]

"What should I say? Nn-"

But, in any case.....

"I mean, it's enough for us to talk about that kind of love."

Seeing Meishen whose face was still flushed with redness, Mifi deeply felt this way.

Of course, today's interview wouldn't be able to be written into an article.

Because Mifi was yelled at by the editor, 'How could there be this kind of girl!'

Mortal Technica

Spring was near.

"The weather is really nice."

Harley leisurely drank tea while looking at the scenery outside from the window of the research lab.

Recently, there had been some new students looking to enter the school next semester who had taken the roaming buses to come here, so things could become noisy easily.

However, in the end that kind of situation would only happen in the area with residences for foreigners, so the location of Harley's research lab - also the area of the Alchemy Department - was still very quiet.

More importantly, though it hadn't been long, when the deeply cold winter finished, the warm air that came with spring was washing away any tension in the atmosphere.

Just opening the closed window let fresh air flow in, making one feel fantastic.

However.....

"Close the window, dust will get in."

"Guah, my files! My files are flying away! Hurry up and close the window!"

The voices coming from behind his back made Harley frown. After closing the window, he turned his head and looked behind him.

"Uh..... I think I should still say it."

The two companions who used the research lab along with him were here - Kirik and Taurus. The three of them all specialized in Dites, so they would research together, but they didn't deliberately collaborate, so the reports and research results that were submitted to the Alchemy Department were done individually.

There was the dark-personality Kirik who always wore a displeased look, Taurus who always had a bright exterior, and Harley.

"The dust in this room is definitely more than outside, and if you put your files away properly they wouldn't be blown everywhere by the wind."

"Shut up, you're not allowed to lecture me!"

Taurus yelled angrily, but Kirik just narrowed his eyes in dissatisfaction.

But, this room was actually that dirty.

Though there were tables here for three people to do their work individually, research books, magazines, and paper was piled everywhere around the tables, and tools and small parts along with some wires were strewn between them with almost no gaps.

When the three of them focused on research, there were quite a few instances when they would work while eating things, so there were some food scraps and some sauce that seemed to have leaked out dropped on the floor, still there even now.

In Harley's eyes was reflected a piece of vegetable that could have dropped out from a sandwich, which looked miserable after being constantly squashed and trampled by their feet.

.....Why would this kind of scene make a painful feeling emerge in his heart?

"I put my files away so they don't get blown away, and I also know what files are in what place."

"Shut up! I also do that kind of thing!"

Taurus seemed very impatient. But he was normally always very impatient, so Harley wasn't concerned about his response. Though his exterior was bright and lively, his inner feelings were this explosive, just like how Kirik always had an unpleasant expression on his face. In other words, this was their normal state of mind. Harley wondered how he was able to survive in this kind of environment.

The reason everyone said alchemists were all weird people was related to this kind of situation.

After drinking the remaining tea, Harley drew out a paper from the tools and files that had been blown around by the wind.

"But, the budget increase is really great."

Today, unexpected good news had come to this research lab. Other than Military Artists, all of the underclassmen up to the third-years all belonged to the general education subject, and they could only change to a specialized department after rising to their fourth year, but the Alchemy students weren't the same. As long as they passed a special test that was held after they reached their second year, they could enter the Alchemy Department earlier. Studying Dites required proficiency in various areas, and the goal of this was to get them started earlier and cultivate the people with these comprehensive technical skills, but most people felt that they did this to 'quickly send the weirdos to where they should be'.

It was sorrowful that the Alchemy students had no way of negating that.

The three people staying in this research lab were currently in the third year, and they were all geniuses or scholars that had passed the special exam.

Moreover, the results of the Alchemy Student budget committee meeting had been released today, and they had decided to raise the budget of the research lab of Harley and the others.

"Hmph, not so much as our research findings were affirmed, but rather because we were lucky enough to have the Student Council request us to make that thing."

Kirik harrumphed and sounded displeased.

"The Adamantium Dite."

Taurus also seemed to feel displeased.

"The multiple form function I had so much trouble making didn't even get used!"

The idea of the Adamantium Dite, which could change the Dite mixing ratio during battle, had been proposed by Kirik, but Taurus had been the one who had the skills to implement this idea. So, Taurus felt very displeased that Layfon almost hadn't used the Adamantium Dite's biggest selling point - the multi-form function - in actual battle.

Though Kirik had felt satisfied at Layfon's results when he had begun using blades, the weapons that they made were slightly different from what he imagined in his heart, so he was probably also displeased.

However, Harley was different.

"Really? But I think it should be that way."

Harley believed that what Layfon wanted most wasn't actually improvements in the weapon's shape or performance. Layfon possessed a Kei strong enough to amaze others, so what Layfon needed should be a Dite that allowed him to use as much of that strength as possible. Because of this, Harley was working with other things as well as the Adamantium Dite in order to improve their Kei capacities as much as possible.

However, until now, Harley still hadn't been able to make anything surpassing the Adamantium Dite.

Though this made Harley feel dissatisfied, he didn't hate the feeling of continuing to move forward. After all, this would be the fourth spring to welcome in after he had come to Zuellni with the goal of becoming a Dite mechanic. He still needed two years to graduate, and after graduation he could still work with his parents as a Dite mechanic and learn many things from those seniors. Even if he could easily reach his goal, it would only make the things behind him uninteresting.

It was good for people to have something to challenge them, Harley thought.

In this regard, the other two people with bad moods and impatient attitudes were also because they hadn't reached the goals they had set. The reason they were able to keep themselves motivated was related to those attitudes. The research results of the two of them had never been affected by their bad moods or impatient attitudes, so that was probably how things were.

"Ah, whatever! In any case, we should decide what to do next!"

Taurus spoke loudly as if to change the mood.

"What? You want to make something together again?"

Kirik frowned in annoyance.

"I want to research the golden ratio of durability and cutting power, along with new materials that are able to realize that ratio."

"Rather than that, the multi-form function is better! This time I'll definitely research something useful! Let's complete the Karen Kei specialized Dite that I've been testing recently!"

"Didn't we already reach the conclusion that Karen Kei doesn't need multi-form functionality?"

"Conclusions of that level won't douse my passion!"

"There's nothing more troublesome than a researcher who doesn't think about the user."

"You're the only one with no right to say that!"

It was already a custom for the two of them to bicker, so Harley quickly stopped listening to their conversation, and turned his eyes to the window.

Many things had happened this year.

More than a year had passed since Nina had added him to the Seventeenth platoon, but if he used the opening ceremony as a starting point, it was about to be one year. Seeing the fresh new students who would enter next year, Harley felt that even more clearly.

It has almost been a year since he - Layfon Alsief - had come here. On the scale of a human's life, one year wasn't that long of a

time. But, it definitely wasn't an exaggeration to say that many things had happened in a year.

He had entered the platoon competition with the seventeenth platoon that had problems even competing, had obtained continuous victories like never before, and even proved his power because filth monsters had attacked. Because of his power, the Adamantium Dite that had been rejected in the planning phase had been born. And because he was here, the Shim Adamantium Dite had been thought up especially from his fighting methods.

Moreover, though it didn't have anything to do with him, Harley had also seen progress in protective gear meant for fighting filth monsters and Kei cannons.

This was a fight for survival. Though Harley didn't want to agree with that kind of thought, it was because he was in this kind of battle that his techniques had developed this quickly. The Alchemy students had responded to the Military Arts students' requests and created new things. Harley believed that process was extremely natural.

It was because of Layfon that he had been able to spend such a substantial year.

It was because..... of Layfon.....

"....."

Looking a year back, a certain scene suddenly flashed through his mind.

Harley normally wouldn't care about that kind of thing. Especially when he was focusing on research, he could even be said to be totally immersed in his thoughts.

But Harley Sutton was a person, a living being, and also a man. He had instinctive desires. Fatigue and hunger were also like that. Though he could ignore those needs when his mind was focused on researching, there were limits to what he could endure. And that was applicable to the situation, as expected.

Any healthy boy would naturally be like that.

"Ahh....."

So even if he couldn't help from murmuring that kind of thing, he was helpless about it.

"I really want a girlfriend."

What emerged in his mind was the situation surrounding Layfon. He got bentos of love, and there were people who made food for him when he was at home and in training..... Not only that, even Felli who had been reluctant to join had even become more active after he entered. Not only that, his childhood friend from his hometown had come to find him, like a girl who admired him following him to this Academy City. Would the day come when there weren't any girls around him..... Harley couldn't help but doubt that.

Layfon originally hadn't seemed like he had been trying to become sweethearts with any of the girls, but Harley couldn't

know how that situation would turn out later. Particularly, in the business concerning Grendan recently, some sort of situation seemed to have occurred with his childhood friend, and maybe that made him realize his own feelings slightly. Sharnid always jokingly said that he had a congenital slowness, but maybe there would be a day when he would have to take back that teasing.

Harley thought that this was essentially a good thing for Layfon .

He definitely didn't feel..... unhappy.

After all, in the Academy City Zuellni, platoon members were like celebrities. Though the scales differed in size, every platoon had their own fan club, and it wasn't a strange thing for some people to send gifts over during training. Never mind Sharnid and Felli along with the Dalshena who was originally from the tenth platoon, Harley had even seen the new platoon member Naruki receive gifts.

It wasn't only Layfon who could encounter this kind of good situation particularly easily. Harley had also seen people other than the list he had just mentioned receiving gifts from their fans.

However, what should he say- it was definitely a problem of distance. Though Sharnid was frivolous, he would maintain a suitable distance when he was dealing with his female fans. Though Layfon also didn't agree to his fans' solicitations easily, from another point of view, there were many girls who were very close to him, and that was definitely the reason Harley cared about this matter.

Feeling someone's gaze, Harley suddenly returned to his senses.

".....What is it?"

At some time, Kirik and Taurus had stopped their bickering, and the two of them silently looked at Harley.

"Harley....."

"You....."

"W.....what.....?"

"....."

"....."

"D.....don't be like that, don't look at me like that!"

The pitying gazes from the two of them sent Harley into disarray.

"Don't think about it, it will only make you feel empty."

"What? You're already that backed up? How sad."

"Shut up! Think about why that is!"

Though Harley had that thought, he hadn't thought he would unexpectedly give it words, and he realized that the temperature of his face had jumped.

"There aren't any good women in the real world. Don't we also have research! Since you have those kinds of thoughts, why don't you do this?"

Harley thought that Taurus was going to grab his own arm tightly, but Taurus offered the magazine in his hands for him to see.

On it was a two-dimensional girl.

Her body was very petite, and she was very cute. Her creator had put an extreme emphasis on cuteness into her drawing, so if she appeared in the three dimensional world, her entire body might be filled with unnatural feelings from top to bottom, but she was indeed cute when shown in a magazine.

"This is the superb maiden Lantica!"

For some reason, Taurus said the name of the two-dimensional girl with a very proud tone.

"If you make something yourself, it will have a loving feeling that something mass-produced won't, and I think that after your possessive desires are satisfied, incredible things can happen. Ah, though the basic structure is the same, models like skeletons or similar things obviously have their own differences. After all, making something that's exactly the same doesn't have any significance."

"No thanks, reality is better!"

"Bastard! This is also reality!"

"I'll enjoy that kind of thing after I've looked at reality!"

"Don't think that only reality can make you happy!"

Harley already wasn't very clear on the situation. Right now he was being lured in by Taurus into that territory that he could never

come back from while being immersed in Kirik's extremely contemptuous gaze. In the end, Harley left the research lab without making any progress at all.

Just sighing was meaningless.

Though no one was criticizing him, Harley who was walking along on the road back home sighed while thinking that.

Anyone single, regardless of whom, should..... yes, they would feel the sudden loneliness that he felt to be unbearable.

Of course, even if he just spoke about it unconsciously, Harley understood that it was a very empty action. Thinking from Kirik and Taurus's point of view, it would be unbearable to be forced to listen to such words. After all, the two of them were people who were even worse than Harley at communicating with others, and Harley also knew that they didn't have girlfriends.

Normally, even Harley wouldn't think of such matters. But as he was now, with his body heavy and the sounds of the city's legs reverberating through the spring air, he suddenly had that urgent thought.

Maybe the feeling of spring created the feeling in him that he would have a new encounter.

That kind of feeling would often be a mistake, and Harley had long since understood that fact, but he still couldn't stop that feeling from emerging. Even if it couldn't be confirmed, even if it were just a kind of mood, Harley still had to suddenly face this kind of loneliness and this kind of feeling.

"Hah....."

He couldn't stop sighing.

Once he left the school building, he could only return home - the current Harley had trouble bearing that current feeling. If there was a good opportunity, maybe he might be able to easily get rid of that feeling, but he couldn't control that himself, which was the unfortunate and troublesome part of critical situations. So the only thing Harley could do right now was count the constant sighs that came out of his mouth.

But, as said before - for good opportunities and encounters, since he couldn't control them, the people involved had no way to knowing when they would occur.

So, Harley didn't know at all that there was a person blocking his road. Harley had no way of knowing that this person was a girl , or that that girl would open her mouth to speak to him, or what her words would be.

In other words, all of this suddenly happened.

Recently, she hadn't had many opportunities to meet Harley. If they weren't during the refurbishment of the Military Arts hall. Though the two of them were childhood friends from the same hometown, if they lost the opportunity to see each other, they obviously wouldn't meet.

But, even if there was no platoon training, she had a character that wouldn't neglect her individual training - that was the reason Nina was Nina.

With no other choice, Nina went to Harley's research lab to ask Harley to fix her training Dite.

However, Harley wasn't inside the research lab.

"He hasn't come at all recently."

So, the person burdened with the repairs turned into Kirik who was wearing the same discontent face as usual, and the Dite was connected through a special machine to his terminal.

"Is he sick?"

It was really strange for Harley to not come to the research lab, a situation as strange as Nina skipping training without a reason.

"No....."

Several wrinkles were added to his unhappy expression as he murmured quietly. The movements of his hands didn't stop as he did that.

"No..... In some sense, it counts as a sickness."

"Nn? What does that mean?"

Nina didn't understand what Kirik had said, so she tilted her head and showed a confused expression.

"No....."

Kirik replied very vaguely. But, maybe his mind and hands could function independently, as the repairs of the Dite had already progressed to the next stage.

"It's a material deterioration. Recently, the lifetimes of Dites have become shorter."

Kirik spoke while reaching into the box next to the console..... from Nina's perspective, she really couldn't make out what difference there was between the contents of that box and the trashcan beside it, but he still took out a new Dite material from inside it and commenced replacement work.

"Ah..... It's because....."

Just as the words were about to leave her mouth, Nina retracted them.

Previously when Zuellni had been caught in a crisis, Nina's ability had increased in a short period of time, even making it so that she couldn't use her own power completely with a normal Dite - a similar plight as Layfon.

Because of this, Nina had gotten in trouble, but resolved this problem by obtaining the Electronic Fairy's help. [2]

However, she couldn't use those in routine training, so she could only use a normal Dite. But, maybe Nina hadn't achieved Layfon's level of power control, and normal Dites would become scrapped in her hands.

"What happened?"

"Uh..... maybe I've grown?"

"It's hard to say."

Nina had originally planned on fudging it with a joke, but she got a thorny reply from Kirik.

"Actually, it's more accurate to say that you're being manipulated by a new toy."

He had said that if he observed the condition of the Dite, he could understand almost everything about the Military Artist who was its wielder.

The worlds he spoke stung her chest.

"If it were that guy, he could use the Dite while understanding its limits."

'That guy' obviously meant Layfon. Even now, there were several unrestored Dites arranged on the table. Their forms were all blades, so they were definitely weapons made for Layfon. Kirik also had things he was responsible for, and judging by how he talked, Layfon perfectly fit the part.

Just as Nina was thinking about that, Kirik finished repairing the Dite.

"If there's something you're not satisfied with, go find that guy."

"Thanks."

Nina received the Dite. Kirik gazed at the data in the image reflected on the terminal, like his interest had already moved to a different place. After thanking him again, Nina left the research lab .

Just then, the other resident of the research lab walked in, but he seemed very angry, so he passed by Nina without even noticing she was there.

The angry slam of a door made Nina tilt her head, but she didn't do anything other than feel confused.

"Damn, that bastard!"

Taurus let out an angry voice as soon as he entered the research lab, but Kirik just frowned, not moving his gaze from the image on the terminal.

"Shitty guy, to think he would show those colors!"

It seemed that he was shouting abuse while forcefully kicking the things scattered on the floor, and his feet had kicked something large and hurt a lot. Even with that, he was still angry as he sat down on the chair in front of his working desk.

"....."

"Hey, you couldn't have missed it, right?"

Kirik still kept his ignoring attitude, so Taurus spoke to him with an impatient tone. Kirik expressed the displeasure in his heart with a frown, and then put the hand that had been on his chin to the wheels of his wheelchair. But, he still didn't look at Taurus.

"It just means he's also a man."

"Is that it?"

"Could it be that you have some way of resolving it? Do you want to go convince him to wake him up?"

"Yeah, of course I'll go convince him, I'll tell him to hurry up and wake up. Something like a three-dimensional girl will only bring unhappiness."

It was hard to imagine that the man who had proposed taking two-dimensional girls into three dimensions not long ago would say that kind of line.

No, maybe something taken from two dimensions to three wasn't the same as something that had been three-dimensional from the beginning. But, Kirik had no interest at all in the difference between the two.

"You're the one who should be convinced."

"What did you say!"

"Though it's insignificant, you should wait for that kind of thing to calm down by itself. Right now, nothing we say will be effective. "

In order to end the topic of two and three dimensions, Kirik quickly butted in.

"Tch....."

Taurus clicked and shut his mouth, and Kirik once again focused his mind on the terminal image.

".....Could it be that you're jealous?"

"You're annoying!"

Kirik's simple question made Taurus's face go red.

Her name was Nene Mia Monsouf.

"It's fine to call me Nene or Mia, but don't call me by both names. Since no one would do that in my hometown."

Harley recognized her from when he had just entered the Alchemy department.

She was a senpai one year higher than Harley, and moreover had looked after him quite a bit when he had just entered the Alchemy department. She was quite tall, with a head of short silver hair, and small glasses perched on her nose. He had heard that it was just a measuring instrument she had made herself, so she wasn't actually nearsighted.

Her Alchemy research was autonomous machinery. Like the cleaning machines that could be seen moving back and forth in rooms or buildings, or the trash-picking machines that were occasionally wandering the streets, or the paper book organizing machines in libraries, or the artificial intelligence machines that could be seen everywhere on the roads - any citizen would be able to see those machines.

Battle machines that Military Artists would see during training were also included.

And her focus was being responsible for inventing battle machines used in training.

She seemed a bit neurotic if observed from afar, but if one came close, he could feel that she had a gentle temperament. Was it because she possessed an upright posture like a Military Artist along with friendly eyes? Harley thought so.

"Um, does it trouble you that I suddenly confessed to you?"

"It doesn't, no way."

The intellectual atmosphere she had that Harley did not possess , along with the slight loving atmosphere she gave off, made his face grow hot.

Right now, Harley was in her research lab. This place didn't have to be shared by three people like Harley and the others', but was a personal-use research lab.

There was an object covered by sheets in the room. Though he didn't know what it was, the interior of the room was surprisingly tidy other than it, and a tea set had even been placed. It was a level of tidiness worlds apart from the research lab of Harley and the others, even making him have the thought 'Is this place really a research lab?'.

However, the smell of oil that couldn't be completely removed still told him a fact - this place was the same as the research lab that Harley and the other used, a space that existed to be used for research.

Harley felt a bit light-headed from the sharp aroma from the tea while he tensely sat on the chair.

In the night before, while Harley had been blankly walking on the road, Nene had been the one who appeared in front of him.

What was surprising was that she had confessed to Harley.

This incredibly surprising fact made Harley gape wordlessly in doubt, and he even looked in all directions to see whether there was someone else in the darkness sneakily laughing at his incredulous appearance.

However, he hadn't noticed anyone else there.

"Um, am I no good?"

"Th.....That's not the case at all! Of course that's not true!"

Her words easily captured Harley.

Even now, he still had some doubt about this matter in his heart .

After all, she was a beautiful girl, and excelled to the point of having her personal research lab. Including coming up with the

Adamantium Dite, this year Harley and the others had assisted the seventeenth platoon and Layfon, and helped out with the requests of other platoons as well, and showed their activity in many other areas. Though those results had been recognized by their increase in budget, they still hadn't been permitted to have their own personal research labs for the next year.

Right now, only Layfon could use the Adamantium Dite, so its usage wasn't very widespread. In that regard, the Adamantium Dite couldn't be said to be a breakthrough invention. Though the Shim Adamantium Dite had received a high evaluation, its cost control was poor due to a usage of large amounts of Dite material, and because of this the Student Council hadn't ordered it to be used in actual battle. Without the Student Council's subsidies, the Shim Adamantium Dite could only become an option for a Military Artist looking for the best weapon efficiency. In that regard, this conclusion was quite reasonable.

On the other hand, Nene hadn't only invented training machines for Military Artist use, but she had also tried deriving techniques to be used in other areas, so the scope of her activity was very broad. Moreover, Harley had also heard that she had gotten many actual results, and because of this it could be said that it was a natural outcome for her to possess her personal research lab.

Yes, she was very outstanding.

Why had she, who was like that, chosen himself?

Harley still thought about this.

"Because you're very cute."

"Huh?"

"You showed a look of doubt, so I said the reason. Is that not enough?"

"Th.....that's not what I meant."

An embarrassed feeling of being seen through made Harley lower his head.

"Of course, if you were too poor of an Alchemy student, I wouldn't like you even if you were very cute."

"Uh....."

The word 'like' made his face become even hotter.

Th.....The stimulation was too intense.

To a novice in love like Harley, just that word made his entire body unable to move.

Ahh, but, if he didn't think of a topic to talk about.....

It had already been three days ago since her confession to him. After that, when the two of them met around school, Harley would always become shy like this and unable to properly speak to her.

Ahh, but, topic topic..... What should I talk about?

Harley didn't have anything in his mind that could serve as a topic. Up through now, he had always single-mindedly focused on Dite research, and until now he hadn't even felt interested in other things, like fashion, music, or movies.

On the other hand, Nene wore pretty clothes under her white Alchemy lab coat, and even Harley could see instantly that she was very fashionable. Even in this aspect, Nene still didn't have any faults.

Uuu..... nothing. He no longer had a choice.

"S.....senpai, what research are you conducting now?"

She was also an Alchemy student, so she couldn't hate that kind of topic. Harley thought this as he spoke.

"Right now? I'm making new battle machines for training. Do you want to see?'

"Ah, okay."

Nene wasn't unhappy. Though Harley relaxed a bit, after he saw Nene walking to the covered object, he still went along with her curiously. Since the moment he had entered this room, he had been very interested in the object underneath the sheets.

Nene grabbed the sheets tightly, and pulled them off all at once.

"Uwah....."

What was there was a three-dimensional creature model with a height reaching about up to Harley's chest. Of course, it wasn't just a three-dimensional model.

It was probably a test work, because its outer layer was made quite roughly. Maybe it was made to move by extension, as there were many parts on its head area with such functions. It didn't even have an exoskeleton, and just directly showed the sensory machines inside, with wires hanging down lightly and vertically.

Harley had seen this creature before.

"A larva?"

"Right, used for actual battle training. After all, a mature phase is way too big, and it can fly in the air, so I think it's better to use a simulator to carry out that training. But that would become a large-scale group battle, and also leads to some problem in price of equipment, so because of this we can't use such a method as an answer to Military Artist group training. But, if it were a larva, we only need to make a certain number to let two or three platoons carry out cooperative battle training on the practice field? Moreover, it was also raised once in Military Artist reports that using a simulator doesn't let the Military Artists get used to pain as early as possible."

"I see....."

Nina would be ecstatic once she heard this, Harley thought.

"I plan to make the size of the finished produce even closer to the real creature. But with that, there will be problem with the materials. Though we can manage to make material for the shell from synthetic compression plates made from sand, we definitely need to choose softer materials for the moving systems. Considering how many we'll have to cobble together, how far we can reduce the cost is also a problem."

The eloquent remarks felt quite fresh to Harley. What to strengthen, and what to cut down - when creating a product, those questions were bound to spin around in one's head. However, Harley didn't often think about cost control. Even if he considered it, at it would just be research fees paid as a commission.

Even in Dite research, Harley preferred to adjust Dites made for personal use, so it could be said that he didn't need to go think about cost control. Even if only Layfon could use the Adamantium Dite, Harley thought that its specifications were just that way, so he couldn't do anything about it. Though the Shim Adamantium Dite was almost reaching perfection, Harley didn't change his way of thinking because of it. He thought that in the end he was a researcher, so it was fine to pass the problems of actually using those things to other people to resolve. In the end, applicability wasn't very important when chasing personal bests.

Maybe this was the correct thinking of a researcher.

But, if he really wanted to let his creations become reality, thinking about those parts of the product would definitely make it

easier for them to be accepted. Not giving the question 'how can this thing be used?' to the user when things were completed, but giving the other party a direction to some extent, that would make it more comfortable for the other party.

This person couldn't only research.

Harley had originally respected this senpai greatly, and after learning of her ways of thinking, that thought became even more deeply rooted.

"Senpai's really amazing."

"That's not true. Also, your Dite adjustment techniques have won very high praise among the Military Artists."

"That couldn't be."

"......Hm, I want to let you see something."

"Huh?"

"Actually, I'm mostly already chosen the materials. But considering the cost, I can't use very good materials, so I've encountered a small bottleneck in calculated strength."

"Ahh, I see."

An actual larva..... Harley had never seen the actual moving creature with his own eyes, but he had participated in after-battle cleanup, and had actually touched their exoskeletons and felt their toughness. Moreover, after performing anatomies of many larvae

and researching, he had obtained various data. It would definitely be very difficult to make such a thing move, even to just let it advance forward. No, it was enough to just make it move. But, if its movements easily stopped after a single blow from a Military Artist student, then it would be a waste. In that case, it needed some degree of strength. Though a compromise had to be made with the premise of mass production, if even its performance was compromised, then it would have no reason for existing.

"Can I ask for a bit of your opinion?"

"Of course that's no problem, leave it to me!"

Harley thumped his chest.

Compared to not knowing what to say, this was much better.

At the time, that was what Harley thought.

"Can I bother you for a moment?"

After hearing those words, Kirik moved the hands placed on his wheelchair's wheels. After class, he prepared to go to the research lab where he normally stayed, and this was something that happened in the meantime. So, his wheelchair stopped. At first

glance, it was just a normal hand-powered wheelchair without any special functions, but actually just by placing one's hands on the cover of the wheels and controlling it with subtle force, it could move by itself.

But changing directions was still really annoying - just as Kirik thought this, the other party moved in front of him.

Kirik remembered that he was in a high position and a second-year Alchemy student, but he didn't remember the other person's name. Had he heard it before? Kirik tried remembering, but even that action felt troublesome to him.

"What do you want?"

"......Hey you, I'm the Head."

"So what do you want?"

"....."

After Kirik asked again, the other person showed an expression as if his momentum had been stopped and swallowed the words in his mouth.

"......Are you in the same research lab as Harley Sutton?"

"Why?"

Kirik quietly gave off an impatient air. I'm the Head so you obviously have to show respect..... it wasn't that attitude that made Kirik impatient, but from the words in the beginning, he had faintly felt the dislike the other person had towards him.

That man showed a timid expression again. However, this time his face clearly showed the dislike he held for Kirik.

"He's being used."

"....."

Maybe he needed some time to be able to restore his mind's vigor, as his face constantly twitched. Kirik sat on his wheelchair, so the man's gaze was above him. Maybe the height of his vision made the man have a mistaken feeling of strength over the other person, and his face finally showed an atmosphere of complete contempt for Kirik.

"He's really pitiful. There are a lot of innocent guys in the Alchemy Department, and she's also a beautiful girl, so he was easily tricked, and doesn't know that he's just being used for the next assessment test."

"....."

The man already completely despised Kirik, and his words became more plentiful. Kirik quietly observed from the side.

"Because this year's research results were poor, her current position is very precarious. If the next battle assessment fails, she

might be evicted from her research lab. She's using him for that purpose....."

"Have you spoken enough?"

"Nn? .....Ack!"

Kirik interrupted the man's words. Because the man had gotten carried away, he had unknowingly moved his gaze from Kirik's body at some point. After seeing Kirik's expression, his voice choked.

"Then please get out."

Kirik looked at the man with a face even more displeased than normal, and the man was completely cowed by that gaze. He hastily moved back from in front of the wheelchair.

"Since you're also a researcher, why don't you spend the time you use gossiping about other people on the things you want to create?"

"Ah, uwah, ah....."

"....."

Kirik looked at the man's shameful face without interest, and moved his wheelchair.

"Hey!"

After a while, a familiar voice caught up.

It was Taurus.

"Hey, was that talk for real just now? What should we do?"

"Nothing."

Taurus who had been hiding somewhere eavesdropping said this anxiously, but Kirik just frowned, muttering with his usual expression.

"Though that guy is stupid, he's not an idiot."

This day had finally come.

The day of the battle assessment.

There wasn't anyone on the battlefield during the holiday. The morning air was clear and fresh, and the smell of oil gradually seeped into it.

Harley listened to the growl of the motor next to his ears while connecting the terminal to the battle training-usage mock filth monster - named 'A-1' - to check its condition.

Though there had been other workers helping when it had been moved here, it was only Harley and Nene who were responsible for inspecting A-1.

"How is it?"

The voice coming from behind him was filled with worry. The sound of footsteps came from the restless Nene, continuously passing through Harley's back.

"Don't worry, the movement systems are secure, and it operates very efficiently. The data seems completely the same compared to the tests that we performed earlier."

Harley ignored Nene's impatient mood, continuing to begin the inspection of the artificial intelligence. This part should have been done by Nene, but for some reason, she had given the inspection work to Harley after the frame had been assembled, doing other work herself.

It felt strange.

Harley liked doing things that weren't routine, because it could put him in a good mood and various ideas would spill forth from points of view that he had never thought about. The inspiration he had obtained by working together with Nene on A-1 was even more than his normal repair work on abandoned products. He had even written down some ideas, and planned on immediately starting them after this business ended.

Even so, this was still very strange.

"Nene-senpai, please do the final check."

From Harley's point of view, there were no problems with the artificial intelligence. The artificial intelligence that this machine used didn't have much of a difference with the ones used by cleaning machines. The different part was in acknowledging whether objects were enemies or trash, and the responses made were to attack or to pick up, those were the only dissimilarities.

"Nn, if Harley thinks there are no problems after seeing it, then that's enough."

Nene said this without even looking at the image on the terminal.

It really was very strange.

Though Harley thought this, right now he didn't have time to ask about it.

The minute hand of the clock indicated that the assessment would soon begin.

The communication machine in the preparation room gave off an electronic noise, and Nene pressed the button.

"Okay, Understood."

After she ended her response, Harley anxiously took off the machine attached on top of the A-1, checking whether the outer shell was indeed connected, and readying it to a state where it could activate at any time.

"Let's go."

"Alright."

Harley nodded his head, and gave the start button of the A-1 to her. She quietly gazed at the button for a bit, and then pressed it.

A-1 quietly moved, and then began advancing towards the practice field. In order to follow it, Harley and the others rode a small motorcycle.

A-1's sensory machines accurately locked on the specified standby location. It advanced towards there, and after checking the location, it stopped.

When the motorcycle stopped slightly behind it, the two of them began observing the situation.

Though Harley and Nene couldn't see, the battle training-usage mock filth monsters invented by other students should be positioned on the other side of the practice field.

This was a fight between battle training-usage mock filth monsters. Harley and the others had to win this fight, and they had to do more than just win against their opponent. They had to obtain victory comprehensively - like durability, lifetime, ease of

repairs, cost efficiency for mass production - outside of battle as well.

This was very difficult.

If it were just for winning a fight, certain parts wouldn't require any expenditure of effort. However, if the important parts weren't improved because of other portions that had to be worked on, the creator would feel anxious, and that anxiety was related to the anxiety they felt after coming here.

Nene, who had been the creator, obviously had a solemn expression on her face.

"Don't worry, we'll win."

Harley blurted that out.

Nene showed a surprised expression and turned around, and then a wry smile emerged on her face.

"How can the researcher say that kind of wishful, cheap prediction."

The beep announcing the start of the competition sounded.

A-1 whose motor was quietly running began to move at this moment. A real larva would use countless legs to support and move its giant body. But replicating that kind of movement method would make the machinery become complex and errors would emerge, so the two of them had decided to use the treads that heavy-duty construction vehicles used as a movement system.

The tread movement system accurately dug into the damp soil of the practice field, and then began advancing. A-1 still wasn't at full speed, because it was using its sensing machines to locate the enemy's position.

Not long after, and maybe because its sensing machines had locked on to the enemy position, A-1 suddenly explosively raised its speed.

"Let's go back."

"Okay."

Even if they chased it they couldn't do anything. In order to return to the preparation room and observe the data from A-1, the two of them moved the motorcycle.

A-1 advanced.

The enemy's position was very clear, and the distance continued to shorten. The speed at which the two drew closer was even faster than the speed of A-1, indicating that the opponent had also noticed A-1's location. But it didn't change any fighting strategies according to this fact, just single-mindedly charging forward.

According to testimony of the Military Artists, this was exactly the same as the usual attack of larvae. If there wasn't any abnormality, the larva's movements would probably be derived

from its survival instinct, but A-1's situation was because its designer had only allowed it to take the actions 'charge at the enemy and then destroy it'.

A-1 was a giant attacking weapon. It could be said that it single-mindedly charged it target, used its outer shell to collide, smashing the enemy, and that this was its only reason for existence .

A-1 advanced. It knocked over the manmade vegetation in the center of the practice field, trampling them while it advanced.

The locked target was at a distance that could be confirmed with the eyes.

A battle training-usage mock filth monster that had been given the same reason for existence charged at A-1. A-1 boldly rushed the enemy.

The outer shells of the two collided, but one side was knocked back, things that could be called sparks if not for their overly strong luminosity burst out, and a boom shook the ground.

The sudden sound even reached Harley and Nene.

"How's the damage?"

After Nene asked with a stiff voice, Harley began reading the information displayed on the screen.

"Some damage and cracking has appeared on the outer shell, and the internal machinery..... is alright!"

Harley cried out very happily. But, Nene didn't respond. Turning around, he could only see her arms tightly wrapped around her chest, and she seemed a bit dazed.

"We did it....."

"We did it!"

Nene's stiff body began to slowly soften. However, the test hadn't yet ended. Harley quickly moved his gaze back to the image on the terminal.

"The machinery is still suffering a massive load in several areas. The two sides are pushing each other right now. But there's no problem with movement power, and the increase in temperature is also in the predicted range."

By the displayed data, he could understand that the two sides were currently pushing each other at a slow speed, and the collision that had occurred just now hadn't sent any side flying, and they had entered a tug-of-war with the manner of pushing each other directly. When they had a Military Artist as an opponent, this kind of situation couldn't have much significance. However, since the moment Harley had heard of this assessment, he had constantly thought about this possibility. So Harley had put in quite a bit of work on the various load capacities of the machinery.

Harley was confident in its endurance.

Next was power, and that would be good if they could win in this battle of strength.

A tension that made his stomach clench assaulted Harley, and he also felt from behind his back that Nene who had temporarily gotten out of her rigid state was tensing up again. The tension of the two of them was even sent into the terminal, and maybe because of this, the many words on the image changed to make them feel abnormally anxious.

"......Ah!"

Harley gazed at the changing words. The load amounts on the machinery that sent power to the treads had begun quickly decreasing. That meant that the treads were digging into the ground normally and moving forward. That definitely wasn't because the fight with the opponent had already been resolved, and the evidence was that it was still enduring a load higher than during normal movement.

"We're pushing it back..... Yes, we're pushing it back!"

Harley clapped his hands.

"....."

"Yes! Go! Do it!"

Harley wasn't concerned about Nene's silence, but continued to jump with the data on the terminal image. The power going into the tread system continued to increase, and the tread system

responded, pushing forward while biting into the ground. The load being endured by the front of the outer shell had changed. Though there had been damage accumulated at the surface and cracks that continued to spread, the interior was still unharmed.

A-1 smoothly pushed the opponent.

Just then, a communication machine suddenly beeped.

"......What?"

The test hadn't ended. According to the schedule, a communication shouldn't have come at this critical point.

Nene anxiously grabbed the communication machine.

"......Yes.....Huh?"

That voice showed her anxiety to Harley. The data continued showing their side’s advantage, but Nene's face showed that some unfortunate situation had happened.

"I understand, I'll quickly take countermeasures..... as insurance , please prepare the shelters."

The voice filled with a sense of crisis made Harley stand up.

"Senpai, what's happened?"

"......The opponents seem to have already given out the stop signal."

"Huh?"

The surprised Harley quickly checked the terminal image. However, the data listed out from the sensing machines didn't indicate such a situation.

This was a training-usage machine, so its goal wasn't to give the opponent deadly wounds. Because of this, during training, the fighting outfits of Military Artists would be affixed with machines monitoring their vital signals. Once their livelihood was down to a certain value, that machine would broadcast the stop signal. The machine was installed with safety measures, and once it received that stop signal it would stop its attack, but.....

"Are the safety measures not operating normally? Or is it the sensing machines? It couldn't be....."

Was it the collision at the beginning that had made the sensing machines go faulty? But no such signals had appeared. In that case , was the data shown on the terminal wrong?

Regardless of how he operated the terminal, Harley couldn't find out the reason.

"Senpai, I'm counting on you."

"Nn."

Harley was helpless. In this situation, he could really only rely on the creator to resolve things. After Harley left his position, the green-faced Nene quickly began operating the terminal. Her

operation sequence was the same as Harley's, so it really could only give the same outcome.

"It couldn't be....."

After murmuring this, Nene closed the monitor data for the moment, and called up other programs.

It was the artificial intelligence program of A-1's movement.

".....An error has really appeared in the connection to the sensing machines."

"Huh?"

"The sensing machines should have received the stop signal. But , the sensing machines couldn't identify that signal, so they took it as noise and ignored it. With that, the stop signal obviously wouldn't appear in the monitoring data."

"How....."

Harley shook for a moment, and then quickly stood up. He couldn't just spectate like this. A-1 was still advancing, and he feared that it was completely destroying the opponent machine..... In other words, if the opponent continued to send the enemy identification signal, A-1 wouldn't stop attacking. If this went on, A-1 would hit the wall of the practice field. Harley didn't think that the wall would be destroyed, but judging from A-1's direction of advance, it might hit directly into the other side's preparation room. And moreover, the two sides seemed to only have their

machines advance in straight lines, so that possibility was quite high.

"Hurry up and send the emergency stop signal!"

"No good, it's an error with the sensing machines. It won't receive the signals that we send."

"Then what if we stop the other side's enemy identification signal?"

"If we could do it, it probably would have been done already. Since they can't do it, that means that problems might also have been produced in the opponent's because of that collision."

"How....."

Harley held his breath, but Nene in front of him hung her head.

"Ahh..... this is karma."

"......Huh?"

"I only ignored such an essential place because I planned on cheating."

"....."

"My results this year weren't very good. It was even bad to a level where this test would decide whether my research lab was taken back or not."

Facing Nene's sudden confession, Harley was speechless.

"I lost my self-confidence. Because I didn't want my current research lab to be taken away, I invented 'A-1' for this assessment, but I didn't think I could succeed by myself at all..... Just then, I heard that your results were very excellent, and that's why I wanted to see whether I could rely on you to turn the tables....."

"Uh, that kind of stuff doesn't matter right now."

Nene's sudden monologue surprised Harley.

It wasn't because he learned of her true thoughts.

Rather, because she was saying these kinds of things right now.

Right now wasn't a time to talk about those things.

"If senpai wants to say something, I'll listen properly after this, but right now let's first put our minds to what we can do."

"By 'what we can do', you mean....."

Nene also showed a surprised expression. Her confession just now clearly meant that her feelings towards Harley were fake.

However, Harley didn't care about that matter.

"Senpai, you can fix this error quickly, right?"

"Huh? Nn....."

"Then I'm counting on you."

"But, even if I fix the program on this side, it won't affect anything out there. Didn't I say? The sensing machines have errors ....."

"In that case, we can only change the program directly."

"Directly, meaning....."

"I'll do it."

"....."

"Hurry!"

"O.....Okay!"

Harley shouted, and Nene quickly and hurriedly operated the terminal to rewrite the program. Though Nene was panicked and unfocused, she was a technician in the end. She already had the necessary procedures in her brain, so her fingers moved correctly, and changed the program in the blink of an eye.

She put the program into a data chip.

During this process, Harley started up the engine of a small motorcycle.

"Just insert this into the third port on the back outer shell portion, and the program will be changed instantly."

"Got it."

After putting the data chip he received into his pocket, Harley started up the motorcycle.

Nene didn't do anything, just watching from the side.

He drove the motorcycle.

Harley drove full-throttle towards the center of the forest. He dodged the trees that grew around randomly while driving on the bumpy road with what definitely could not be called good driving, also avoiding various obstacles.

Normally, Harley would have screamed and relaxed the throttles long ago, but right now he didn't do that. Harley's mind was full of how he should find A-1, whose position he had been unable to confirm with his eyes yet, so he focused on chasing the tread tracks carved into the ground and the path of trees knocked over by A-1. If he went along with A-1's trail, he wouldn't encounter any obstacles, so this was a very fortunate situation for him who didn't have much motor skills.

"Got it!"

Harley muttered this, and almost bit his tongue because of the left and right swaying as he drove over the ground.

After passing through the forest, Harley saw A-1. The opponent's training-usage mock filth monster was on the ground, seemingly in a state of having been knocked over by A-1. In that situation, it wouldn't be strange for its stop signal to have been given out. The structure of the machine that sent out the stop signal should be quite simple, so it wasn't easy to break, but A-1 that received this signal had a problem and was unable to stop.

Harley had been going full throttle long ago, but after he left the bad road conditions of the manmade forest, the motorcycle's speed went up a bit. More importantly, A-1 was advancing while pushing the enemy, so its speed wasn't as fast.

The motorcycle Harley was seated on was indeed closing in on A-1. The moving battle machine seemed to give off pressure when viewed from up close. Harley wasn't fazed by that pressure, and set his target as the back outer shell.

"Almost there..... Alright!"

Just as the front wheel was about to touch the back outer shell.....

Harley forcefully swerved them motorcycle and jumped onto A-1.

"Uwah! Ah, uh....."

The pain of his body colliding and the violent shaking almost made Harley forget his position, but he still quickly positioned himself securely on the outer shell. After some work, he succeeded in climbing to his destination.

The vibrations of the tread system constantly shook Harley. Harley used strength to stabilize his feet as he searched for the cover of the third port. He opened it, and then succeeded in inserting the data chip.

There weren't any screens nearby the port indicating whether data was being transmitted. Harley who was sent flying by the intense shaking of A-1 could only trust that he had succeeded in changing the program.

A strong shock sent him into a world of darkness.

Harley awoke in the embrace of something warm.

"Ah, senpai."

Nene's face was in front of him. Her worried face returned to anger the moment Harley awoke, and the pressure with which she held Harley became stronger.

No, he wasn't being held.

He was being tightly embraced.

Until now, Harley had never seen Nene's face this close to his own.

"Huh? Huh.....senpai?"

Why would she be in such a place? Oblivious to the situation, Harley was at a loss.

"How's A-1?"

"It stopped, thanks to you."

"Ah, really? That's great."

The confusion in his heart instantly became indecision. When he was helping to create A-1, Harley had actually completely forgotten about Nene's confession to him, and just spend sleepless nights researching.

But, after everything had ended, Harley calmed down. He once again realized the fact that her confession had just been a lie, and he had just been used.

Harley didn't think much about having been used. He believed that making A-1 was a very helpful experience for himself.

But, it was very sorrowful that the confession had just been a lie .

No, if it were just a lie, then what was going on right now?

"Well, I'm already alright."

Please let me go - the shy Harley planned on saying this, but Nene's look didn't permit him to do so.

"Um, do you know why everyone from my hometown has two names, but only let other people call them by one of them?"

"Huh? No....."

"Because only a promised lover can call them by both names."

Nene closed her eyes and brought her face in close.

A sensation he had never felt before went through Harley.

"This time isn't a lie."

Harley sank into darkness again because of his brain's computing power was overloaded, as the last words he heard were that passionate, and that sweet.

That was how things should have been.....

"You're amazing, Harley."

After being woken up by a strange electronic voice, what appeared before his eyes was a being that couldn't exist in the real world.

"Uwoahhhhhh!"

Harley couldn't help but scream.

It wasn't Nene's intellectual and friendly face that was there. It was composed of inorganic machinery and didn't look like it was alive, and of course it didn't have the muscles of a human.

It was a robot.

And, Harley had seen that figure.

It was the superb maiden Lantica.

"Wahahahaha! How are my techniques!"

Taurus laughed loudly from behind Lantica.

"It's equipped with artificial intelligence, so it can act independently to a degree, and moreover it can identify people in

its database. It can even predict the feelings of the person from what they say, and then make expressions. If I just cover it with imitation skin, I can complete a beautiful, flawless cyborg!"

"Huh? Huh?"

Harley whose brain was completely confused looked around everywhere.

It was a hospital room.

"Huh? What's going on here?"

"I dunno."

Taurus patted Lantica's head. He was too eye-catching, so Harley only noticed after a while that Kirik was on the other side.

"We only came here after receiving a communication saying that you were injured, so we don't know anything more than that."

"Huh? Uh, then what about Nene, M.....Senpai?" [3]

"Didn't see her."

"Huh?"

"Hey hey hey, it's better if you hurry up and forget those girls that will deteriorate some day. Only Lantica is the best. She won't change forever, and can even be upgraded however you desire!"

"You, you're actually saying such pathetic things!"

After making Taurus shut up, Harley once again inspected his surroundings from the white bedsheets, confirming the fact that she wasn't around.

"Huh..... What's going on?"

Why wasn't she here?

Had he really fainted after hearing those words from her mouth ? Or had that just been a dream..... Harley remembered when he had succeeded in inserting the data chip, but maybe because he had suddenly relaxed, the thoughts 'Ah, I might be pretty cool right now' had emerged in his brain.

Was it because of this that he had such a dream, or was it just wishful thinking that he had felt would be nice that way?

Regardless of how Harley thought, he couldn't come up with a conclusion. No, he didn't want to make a conclusion.

But Nene indeed wasn't here right now. In that case, did it mean that the thing just now had really been.....?

"Harley, cheer up."

Lantica placed her inorganic arm on Harley's shoulder.

Harley was almost attracted by her unfinished expression. Though it was a secret, Harley began kind of wanting to make a cyborg.

With Horror House

By now, I no longer knew whether I should talk about this kind of thing with positive emotions.

But, I still want to say it.

I want to say those words.

"Why am I here?"

Ed Delong - that's me - said those words quietly.

It was deep into the night right now.

This was a corner of the Academy City Zuellni.

It was an old building, and probably had been a multi-storied building with a bar inside it, because a rusty signboard was positioned in front of it. Then, had this been a corner where those kinds of stores were gathered together? That kind of area no longer existed now, and there were only roads and parks nearby, and this place had become a connector in between different regions.

Then, why had this building that had been disposed of become like this after all? The big sign prohibiting anyone from entering that hung over the door told me the answer.

Because something had happened here, and the moving city had just let it stay here in this place by itself.

In the end, what was the issue?

"Investigating this matter is one of the activities of us Horror Lovers Club."

Standing in front of the building, the club president explained the contents of the activity. Though she couldn't be seen very clearly because it was dimly lit, the president seemed a bit tense as she explained the contents of the activity to the newly entered students.

When the president explained the investigation of the abandoned building, she made sure to note the precautions. The club actually had to apply with the Student Council and the City Police, and they couldn't litter or vandalize or anything like that.

What was unusual about this scene was.....

"Huhuhu, how promising."

The girl next to me was murmuring those kinds of words.

She was the girl that I had brought here - Eri-senpai.

"Uh, senpai. Though it's a bit late to say this kind of thing now... ..."

"What?"

"I don't remember entering this club."

"Huh? Didn't you enter?'

"Huh?"

"Huh?"

"No, I didn't enter."

"You entered."

"When!?"

"When I introduced you to the new room."

"Whaat!"

Attacked from an unexpected direction, I fell over.

Yes. Not long before I advanced to the second year, I had a new, cheap room introduced to me by Eri.

I took the room. Correct, I indeed felt that I owed her a favor.

But, I hadn't thought that the price of the introduction was to join this club.

"Uwaaaa, I never thought there would be this kind of trap!"

"Huhuhu, what trap, I'm not that incredible....."

"No, I wasn't praising you."

I completely didn't understand why she would be embarrassed in this kind of situation.

Just as we were bickering about those things, the president's explanation seemed to end. Maybe because the president had said something, the Supernatural Lovers Club members began moving one by one.

"Ahh, really. I missed what the president said!"

"Huhuhu, it's alright. Exploring this building is a yearly activity, so....."

Just then-

Eri-senpai's voice suddenly broke off.

"Pardon me."

Huh - Just as I thought that, a clear voice called out to me, so I turned my head and looked backwards, and also because I didn't know the reason why Eri-senpai had stopped talking.

After turning, a beautiful girl appeared in front of me.

She was an unfamiliar girl that I didn't recognize.

"Huh?"

I didn't know why this girl that I had never seen would call out to me.

"Uh..... what is it?"

"If you don't mind, could you allow me to come with you?"

"Huh? Ah, yes..... What?"

I had never experienced being suddenly accosted by a beautiful girl, and it made my brain stop thinking. I replied to her request like it was a reflex.

"Can I take your response as acceptance?"

"Ah, yes. You can. Please go ahead."

"Thank you very much."

After saying this, she stopped in front of me. She had clearly been the one to strike up a conversation, but she completely didn't mind me, who had made strange responses because my mind was in chaos. I looked around in other places. It seemed that everyone had followed instructions and gone into the building in small groups.

Also. Had this girl chosen to be in a group with me?

"Ah, uh..... I'm Ed Delong. A second year."

"I'm Vati Len, a first year. Pleased to meet you."

"Oh, p.....pleased to meet you."

The inexplicable force given off by a beautiful person engulfed me.

"......Ed's got a crush."

"Th......That's not true!"

Unexpected words came from Eri-senpai's mouth, and I became completely flustered.

"Huh? But the attitude you show me is clearly different, hm?"

"No no no, I'm just a bit panicked because things happened suddenly."

"Sorry I was too abrupt and surprised you."

"No, it's alright."

She seemed to have heard the conversation between Eri-senpai and I. I hurriedly responded, and then tried to carefully look at her again. I still knew she was a beautiful girl even though I couldn't see clearly due to the dim lighting, because she was just that beautiful. But, her expression seemed unchanging, as if she were a Psychokinesist. She wore plain clothes, so a normal person like me couldn't tell which side she belonged to. [4]

It would be safer not to ask - I decided not to do anything, thinking this.

.....Just then, I felt that something seemed to be pricking my back.

It couldn't be Eri-senpai's gaze, right?

Was she angry?

Why?

"I'll curse you!"

"Please don't do that, seriously!"

I almost yelled in surprise after being suddenly told that.

If it were senpai, she seemed like she could truly perform such a thing, so I was very frightened.

Vati who stood to the side tilted her head looking at me as if she were confused.

Eri-senpai's normal clothing was already very odd, but still, there was no reason to let her leave a strange impression during the first meeting. In any case, I should smooth things over with a smile first - thinking this, I made eye contact with her, but my whole body frozen in place.

I felt that her eyes were very pure.

Uwa, I had never been stared at by a beautiful girl before.

So I was extraordinarily tense.

When it was announced to be our turn, I even had a feeling of having been saved.

"L.....Let's go."

Unfortunately, it was my first time entering an abandoned building of my own initiative.

There were already many people in the building. If I thought this, I wouldn't even feel scared.

Actually, human voices sounded everywhere, and they even made it to us. The electric lights inside the building weren't on, so we could only rely on the flashlights to prove lighting, but because of the voices that reached my ears, I didn't feel scared at all.

Perhaps it could be said that normal abandoned buildings wouldn't make me feel scared anymore.

"After all, I've also experienced quite a few strange things."

I unconsciously said that.

"Huh?"

"Ah, sorry. I was just talking to myself."

"Really?"

I panicked all of a sudden when Vati asked me this. If other people heard those things, they would definitely believe me to be a strange person.

For example, a hell with infinite boxes and a vomiting ghost, how could I explain those mysterious encounters that Eri-senpai and I had together?

Probably no one would believe me.

Close one. I mumbled this in my heart as I advanced through the abandoned building.

What was going on? I felt that it really wasn't my style to be walking in the front holding a flashlight.

"....."

Uwah, I hadn't even noticed this until now. Unexpectedly, the day had come where I would be walking in front of a beautiful girl , I never would have imagined it!

After noticing this situation, I began becoming tense.

Ohhhhh..... What should I say?

I didn't know what to do.

Unexpectedly, Eri-senpai hadn't said a single word today, and she hadn't even made her prized 'huhuhu' laugh.

She just silently walked behind me.

Why would she choose this critical moment to remain silent - I couldn't help but look up. I could only see a dark ceiling here. Was it telling me that there wouldn't be a savior coming? Did it want me to think of some way to resolve things myself?

Damn, I know. I'll think of something myself.

"......Vati-san, are you interested in this kind of thing?"

I know, I know I can only ask this kind of ordinary question!

But. Other than this, is there anything else I can say?

"No, I have no interest at all."

However, her response was outside of my expectations.

"You don't?"

"No."

"If you don’t, then why.....? Ah, did someone else invite you to come?"

Because she had been invited by a classmate, she had come here with them - that kind of situation could indeed happen.

Then why wasn't she walking with her friend?

That, well, it was probably because they had gotten in a fight or her friend had business and had been unable to come.

"No, I learned of this activity from the bulletin board."

Her response once again was outside of my expectations!

"But if you have no interest, then why.....?"

"Because I have interest in other things."

"Other things?"

"The drawbridge effect."

"Drawbridge? What's that?"

It was a phrase that I had never heard before. I guess it was some sort of bridge. Was it a hanging bridge?

"Also known as the roaming bus effect."

"Roaming bus effect....."

Uh, I knew of roaming buses, but what kind of effect could roaming buses have? I felt somewhat uncomfortable about her saying that, could it be that riding a roaming bus was harmful to the health?

Vati ignored my worries, explaining with an indifferent tone.

"An isolated male-female pair in a tense situation will mistake the physiological response from their body's tense condition as the face-reddening and heart-pounding of love."

"What?"

"The tension produced from anxiety will make the heart beat and pulse quicken, which is also a physiological response when one is conscious of a crush. So if a male and female pair is in a

tense situation, there's a possibility that they will mistake the increased blood pressure and pulse as feelings for the other person ."

"I..... I see, a mistake."

"Yes."

Roaming around in the abandoned building obviously would make one feel frightened and tense, and their pulse would quicken - was that the heart pounding she was talking about? Meaning that people would mistake those feelings for love?

Mistake them for love?

Eh-?

"Then Ed-senpai, is your face red and heart pounding for me?"

"......Sorry, maybe I feel something other than heart pounding towards you."

Something like 'She looks fine, but her personality is so poor!' or 'Never mind Eri-senpai, can I get closer to this beautiful girl?'.

"Really? Judging from the outside, your pulse indeed hasn't become particularly quick, so maybe I failed."

That 'failure', did it mean choosing me was a failure?

I felt that her honesty was stabbing my heart.

Ah, whatever. Becoming discouraged because of words of this level, that's not me!

Also, I was still wondering about something else.

"Um."

"Yes?"

"I see you're completely calm, you aren't scared, right?"

"Yes."

"You don't believe in things like ghosts at all, huh."

But, I still felt a bit scared about entering this kind of place. Though I couldn't see her expression because the surroundings were very dark, she didn't feel scared at all.

"To answer more accurately - I have no interest in believing or not believing in ghosts. Even if ghosts exist, I will be unable to confirm or prove it. Even if ghost do not exist, I will be similarly unable to prove that they don't exist."

"Uh....."

In any case, she really liked to use difficult words.

Again, I felt that this girl was very strange.

But because of this, the feeling of being oppressed that I had when I had been facing a beautiful girl at the start had disappeared . Thinking of this, my feelings couldn't help but become complex.

In other words, was I really used to dealing with strange girls?

A super strange girl walked behind me, so a light level of strangeness wouldn't surprise me.

In the end, was that good or bad?

Speaking of which, Eri-senpai still hadn't said anything at all.

Just as I was thinking about that, Vati continued speaking:

"I don't have any senses that can detect ghosts, nor can I take that fact as evidence that ghosts don't exist. Like how hearing has its range of identification and how vision has its vision range, the senses have ranges to what they can feel. Maybe ghosts are just beings that the current humans are unable to feel through their senses. In that situation, if humans someday invented a new means of sensing, maybe they will be able to prove the existence of ghosts. We can't deny future possibilities, so I can't definitively say that ghosts don't exist. In addition, for now no major issues that can be derived from ghosts have occurred, so because of this I have decided to put this question to the side."

"O.....Oh."

Anyways, I pretended like I already understood. Nn.

"All I can say decisively is that I cannot confirm whether ghosts exist."

"I see."

In other words, it didn't matter whether they did or not, since they hadn't done anything.

I thought that, and that seemed correct. Probably.

But since she said that, maybe ghosts became meaningless beings.

Before I knew Eri-senpai, I had also believed that things like ghosts were just beings from scary stories, and I didn't think that they actually existed in the real world. They were just reasons that people were scared of the dark. No, were they just illusions created because people felt the dark was very scary? I didn't know which came first, but I always had treated ghosts as ambiguous beings.

Because they were ambiguous, the Supernatural Lovers Club was able to explore this abandoned building to enjoy a scare.

No, I hadn't originally come here of my own desire, and didn't have any interest in these things either. It was just for the moment.

If I hadn't met Eri-senpai, things wouldn't have become like this .

That senpai continued to stay silent. I had thought she would quickly refute Vati's opinion.

It wasn't a question of whether they existed or not. Just by fantasizing 'how nice it would be if ghosts existed', they would already have meaning.

A rebuttal like that.

Nn, Eri-senpai would definitely say that kind of thing.

If things were normal.

Really, what was up with her today after all?

Even if I turned backwards, I could only see Eri-senpai following form behind with her head slightly lowered.

What was up with her?

I thought about this.

Heart pounding and a drawbridge effect? Roaming bus effect?

I thought of the words Vati had spoken.

Senpai and I had experienced many mysterious and indescribable things together, and had encountered several crises. Maybe I truly would have died one or two times. Maybe it was only because of the situation that I was saved.

They weren't experiences to make the heart pound, but thrilling experiences to make the heart race.

Had I mistaken the reactions from then as feelings of love?

Or, was I in love?

Was I in love with senpai?

"That's a loop."

Vati's voice made me return to my sense. Many people were excitedly moving around the abandoned building, and this interior portion of the building wasn't as neglected as the exterior. There wasn't even graffiti here, and the floor wasn't damaged either, and of course doors leading to strange places weren't open.

It was just a safe, normal abandoned building.

"Uh, I seem to not have been any help for your experiment, sorry."

"It's no problem, since I just wanted to try it out."

Vati was unconcerned like she said.

We left the abandoned building like that. The Supernatural Lovers Club members who came out first greeted us warmly.

"It might be a bit meddling to say this-"

Just as I was exhaling deeply, Vati said such a thing.

"What?"

"I believe that you should talk to yourself less."

"Huh?"

"I mean before we met up with everyone. Were you practicing acting? Well, goodbye."

I watched Vati leave the area as if she had completed her task while making a doubtful 'Huh?' sound.

"Talking to myself? What is she talking about?"

I had always been talking with senpai. Just as I tried turning around to confirm that.....

"Huh?"

No one was there at all.

"Huh? Ahh....."

I had a sort of bad premonition.

"Ed, good work."

Senpai walked over from an unimaginable direction, as if she were telling me that the bad premonition in my heart was true.

".....Senpai, where have you been tonight?"

"What do you mean 'where have I been', didn't I tell you that I was going to help with tonight's activity?"

"Huh? No, weren't you participating with me?"

"I wasn't. Ahh, but if possible, I also wanted to go around the abandoned building with Ed. Speaking of which, it seems like you were walking with a very pretty girl, huh?"

The resentful voice made me shudder.

Was it a ghost? So Vati hadn't seen it? She couldn't see ghosts, but I shouldn't be able to see ghosts either. But, I had seen it.

There had been a ghost just now.

No, this wasn't the important part. I was more concerned about something else.

The thing that had kept following me had truly looked exactly the same as senpai.

What was going on?

After thinking this, I quickly became uncomfortable.

Moreover, I really didn't believe that those feelings had anything to do with love.

I wanted to think that.

Brain Storming

She wanted to have a grand, happy activity.

"......So what do you plan on doing?"

Leu's cold remark interrupted Samiraya's proposal. She still had her hands raised high in a posture that expressed 'grand'.

The two of them sat on either side of the president's table in the Student Council President's room, in front of the table of the vice president who still did not yet exist. Samiraya kept up her movements expressing 'grand', but Leu looked at a file she held without even batting an eyelash.

"Don't ignore me!"

"Aren't I noticing you right now?"

"Look here!"

"Really."

After sighing, Leu raised her head, and Samiraya happily and vigorously made her 'grand' motions.

"Nn, I already know that."

"You're so cold!"

Samiraya showed a pouty expression. But this was already an old trick, so Leu ignored that reaction and coldly went on with the topic.

"Then, what kind of activity would make everyone happy?"

"A festival!"

Samiraya still continued her 'grand' motions.

"Even if we aren't responsible for holding something like a festival, the Business department and shopping areas and other large club organizations will send us loads of plans. For example, I'm looking at one of them right now."

Leu tapped the file she had been looking at until recently with a pen.

Leu had just listed many organizations, and what she was holding was the festival plan that those organizations had proposed.

"After all, the period of welcoming the new students has ended, so the Business department plans on thinking up some tricks."

The period of time where new students were introduced to basic knowledge about the Academy City by the seniors had already ended, but the shopkeepers wanted the new students to continue patronizing the stores that they liked, and they also

wanted the shops that they like to be their own. Because of this, the shopkeepers would hold special discount sales, and there were also stores that would announce events for new students.

"I believe that there's no need at all right now for such an activity to be held."

"Wu-"

Before those correct remarks, Samiraya showed a dissatisfied expression.

"That's not what I'm talking about!"

"Then can I ask you what it is? Don't just use your feelings to explain things."

"Auu!"

"It's Sami's bad habit."

"Aww....."

Samiraya held her head listlessly, and Leu moved her gaze from her body back to the file. These organizations planned on using their own resources to hold a festival, so Leu truly wanted to tell them 'as you wish', but if she let them do whatever they wanted, it even might lead to problems, and the students would be ill-supervised. So, she first had to set the guidelines for during the festival, and the Student Council could only give their approval after checking that the students' festival plans were in accordance with the regulations.

After the Student Council's audit, the festival would be written into the school calendar. That way, it could attract the notice of others, and secondly they could also adjust the schedule to make sure that festivals didn't overlap with each other. That way, doing so would not only restrict the festivals, but it would also help them out.

Originally, it should have been the work of the bureaucracy downstairs, but because there were far too many proposals, Leu had reached out her hand to help.

Samiraya had also helped, and then she had said the lines just now.

"......It couldn't be that you just don't want to look at these documents, right?"

"M.....Mean~ie~ No one thinks like that. Anyway, I have qualifications for being a desk worker too."

"I know that."

Leu couldn't feel that she would be a very serious desk worker.

"But, I still want to hold an activity led by the Student Council. Not some activity like 'long live Business!' bur something nicer, like some activity that says 'the Student Council is a nice place'."

"Sami....."

It wasn't that Leu didn't understand her demands.

"But still no."

"Why!"

Because they were far too busy.

"So, I was completely refused."

"Oh....."

Why would he be in this kind of place - Layfon thought about this.

In order to maintain his Dite, Layfon had headed to the research lab of Harley and the others, and had been asked there to send a file to the Student Council. His Dite still needed some time to be fully inspected, so Layfon didn't mind helping out with that small task, so he came to the Student Council building.....

"Are you listening?"

"I'm listening."

Layfon didn't know why he had been accosted by Samiraya and even brought to a place inside the Student Council building that people usually didn't come to, by the vending machine area.

"Ah, I also understand the meaning Leu wants to express....."

Layfon had once worked in this building, so he knew that this was the resting area used by the students who worked in the Student Council. Other than Samiraya and Layfon who were sitting on chairs, there weren't any other people here right now.

"Because the Student Council is truly very busy. But, the Student Council is normally already very busy, and more importantly every place wants to hold an activity like a festival. With that mindset, during the entire year there might be some place holding a festival. Moreover, the Student Council also has to deal with other school administrative work. If we take being busy as a reason, then we won't be able to do anything. Do you get it?"

"Oh....."

"President Karian was very conservative when he approved of a festival because quite a few things happened last year. After all, we need to consume selenium to provide power. Was it also a tactic to tighten the policy on energy use? I feel like it probably was."

"Really?"

Even so, Layfon felt that all kinds of activities had been held here. If that counted as conservative, what would happen this year ?

"Ahh, right. You've never seen those grand occasions."

Seeing Layfon's reaction, Samiraya thought of Layfon's year.

"It's really fierce. Every day there were places holding festivals, and though it was truly very fun, we received many petitions complaining that the festival is too noisy, and it was even rowdy to the point that students had to agree that certain regions would have 'no festival weeks'."

"That's too much..... Uh, I've also seen those before!"

Layfon had once seen those words written on a dorm calendar, and remembered that he and some other dorm residents in the same year had discussed how baffling it was.

"Before those regulations were set up, the situation was really chaotic. Festivals would be too frequent, noises would be too loud, and the opposition even set up a secret organization like the Anti-Festival Committee and took many radical actions."

"What?"

"Ah, you don't believe it, huh. But it really happened."

"Really?"

"Really really. It was a very intense protest, and it even led to the City Police having to mobilize. The Military Arts Head Vance who didn't have any connection with the Student Council at the time even fought with the Military Artists of the secret organization."

"Oh....."

"The Masked Festival Man who protected the festival music in everyone's hearts - it was so moving."

Samiraya said this with great emotion, but Layfon just felt a chill.

".....You mean Vance-senpai?"

"Of course."

"Is that a lie?"

"Why?"

"....."

"??"

Layfon moved his gaze from Samiraya whose head was tilted and who showed a confused expression. Layfon could only shake his head when he thought of Vance wearing festival clothes and with a festival mask on his face.

"In the end, Karian who was not yet the Student Council President ended the battle between the Anti-Festival Committee and the others. If you're interested, you can go read the Student Council activity records in the library. If you're willing to look, you might even be able to find hardcopy records."

"Uh..... Do you want to hold a festival?"

After deciding to forget those things that he had heard, Layfon warily asked this.

"Right, a festival held by the Student Council."

"But won't there be many festivals this year?"

If they had placed limitations on the holding of festivals because the number of selenium mines had become few, then since the number of selenium mines had increased this year, it meant that the situation would return to how it had been before Layfon entered.

"Right."

"In that case, then for what reason....."

"Ahh, really. Didn't I just say I didn't want to hear that kind of talk!"

"S.....sorry."

But, Layfon also believed Leu's reasons were very just.

"Even if the reasons for holding them are different, we'll be buried in festivals if there are that many....."

"Err, that makes sense."

Samiraya murmured while deeply thinking. Maybe she would give up with this - Layfon relaxed a bit, thinking this.

However, his thoughts were too naive.

"That means that it'll be fine if both the reason for holding the festival and the external appearance are different, right?"

"What?"

"As long as other people look at it and think 'Ah, this is different !', it'll be fine, is that how it is?"

"Huh? Uh, ah..... That's how it is..... I think?"

Though Layfon felt that something was a bit off, he was unable to resist Samiraya's excited momentum as her eyes shone.

As for what Layfon could do.....

"Then, what good ideas do you have?"

He could only make Samiraya finish saying what she wanted to say, and then end this conversation.

(Even if the idea she says is very strange, I just need to let it go in one ear and out the other.)

Moreover, if she had to verbalize it rather than just think about it, sometimes that would produce the unexpected thought 'Ah, that won't work'. He expected Samiraya to make that kind of response.

Layfon nodded in his heart while he waited for her next words with a smile.

"I guess let's dig a big pit trap over there first?"

"I don't think we should do that."

Layfon's plan had failed.

He didn't even think about it and blurted out those words.

"Wait! There's still more!"

"......What?"

Seeing Samiraya being that frantic, Layfon naturally softened after seeing her look.

"The location of the festival will be in an underground facility! And moreover, how to get there will be a secret. Then, the festival goers will fall into the trap, and everyone will drop in with a boom without knowing!"

"Stop!"

"Why?"

Layfon couldn't understand at all.

"Isn't that very dangerous?"

"I'll take care of it for sure, people won't get hurt."

"If you do that, won't people who didn't plan on joining the festival fall in the trap?"

"My goal is also to let those people also attend the festival!'

"There will definitely be people who will complain!"

"Huh - won't it be fine if we prepare things that will make people feel interested once they see them?"

"I think that it will be extremely difficult to do that."

"I'll think of something."

It was important how one gathered a crowd, but content should be considered first. Maybe that was actually right? After all, Layfon was an outsider to planning festivals, so he didn't know what would be good.

However-

"Uh, I think that setting a trap isn't a good idea."

"Okay, then we'll leave it out for now."

"Just for now?"

"Just for now."

Samiraya who self-confidently closed the book on this made Layfon feel a chill again.

"So then.....?"

"Didn't you also say before? The contents of a festival. That's indeed very important."

"Nn, that's true."

"So let's think of content together. What good ideas do you have ?"

"Even if you suddenly ask me that, I....."

When mentioning a festival, the first thing that appeared in his mind was street vendors, as expected.....

"That's too ordinary."

"That's true."

"Of course we can have booths, but just having vendors is no good. Since there have been so many festivals recently, guests who are tired of street vendors will be unable to accept it, right?"

"Ah..... That's right."

".....Actually, some places are already planning street vendor competitions, so it will be meaningless even if we look in that direction."

".....What cunning insider information."

"Ah? I won't hesitate to utilize our superiority."

She expressed her fighting spirit beautifully.

"It's fine to have vendor stalls, but we can't primarily have vendor stalls. Though it's stupid not to have them, it's stupid to only have stalls. That's what vendor stalls are about, nn."

"Uh, okay."

Then, what were they going to do.

"Can we do something like a competition?"

"Nn - Like a beauty competition. I feel like it's not bad, but there are many other places holding those kinds of activities."

"In that case, what do you plan on doing?"

"That's it!"

Samiraya stuck out her finger, pointing at him forcefully.

"Everything we could do has probably all been done already, so we have to take a different path and find something new, and then have the Student Council lead that activity. How is it?"

"Even if you ask me how that is....."

Layfon wasn't in the Student Council, so he couldn't give any opinion.

"Ah, right. Do you like jelly?"

"Huh? Uh, I don't particularly like it or hate it."

"Really? It's really yucky if it's too sticky."

"What.....? But jellies aren't sticky at all."

"That's true. I think that's the best."

"? Really?"

"Right. Then, what good ideas do you have?"

"Uh, I can't think that fast."

"It's already no good?"

"Yeah....."

Things were way too unreasonable, and Layfon didn't even have the energy to get angry. In any case, he couldn't escape from

this place without thinking of some idea - Thinking this, Layfon put his mind to thinking.

"AH, right. If vendors are no good, then why don't we work with the Agriculture department and people who are experts at cooking, and have an activity like a city-wide eating competition?"

"I see, we can let the first-years eat the cuisine of a different city."

Samiraya nodded her head. Her reaction wasn't bad, so maybe that idea would work.

In other words, maybe he could be freed - Layfon expected those to be her next words.

"In other words..... A real-life performance of taking down and roasting an entire animal?"

"Why did it turn into that!"

"Because, though food is important, if use those methods, then we'll also want to introduce livestock special to the Academy City. Roasting an entire animal, that's awesome."

"Uh....."

Indeed, it seemed very impressive to take down and roast an entire animal, and maybe there were animals that tasted better with that method of cooking. And moreover things tasted better

for some reason when one ate barbeque outside. But, this was the same psychological effect as why it tasted better to eat vendor food during a festival.

But in terms of impact, maybe vendors couldn't compare.

".....Maybe that idea is unexpectedly good."

But maybe it wasn't that novel of an idea - though Layfon thought this, he didn't s ay it.

"Right! Nnnnnn, you've also begun to understand."

Samiraya seemed very happy, and Layfon relaxed his breath.

Now, he was a step closer to being freed.

".....I still want something else."

Samiraya's murmur surprised Layfon.

However, Samiraya wasn't looking over at Layfon, but deep in contemplation.

"We'll do this, and that will be done this way, and then this....."

Maybe it was her thoughts gradually taking shape inside her heart, but Samiraya murmured to herself.

Just then.....

"Ah, you're here!"

"Leu-senpai."

Up through last year, Leu had lived in the same dorm as Nina, so Layfon also recognized her.

"Why is Layfon here too?"

"Uh, how should I explain."

"Ah, I can probably guess what the situation is just by looking."

"Hahaha....."

"Then, what was the Student Council President standing over there messing around with?"

"Leu! I thought of a good idea!"

"What idea?"

"A festival idea!"

"You're still thinking about that?"

"Right, listen to this!"

Leu frowned and made an annoyed expression, but Samiraya wasn't concerned with her reaction.

"So what did it turn into?"

Leu prompted Samiraya to speak, as if she had given up.

"Nn!"

Samiraya nodded vigorously.....

"We'll let the participants fall from the trap into a big pond filled with jelly, and then we'll have a fight against an animal in an underground arena, and then roast it whole."

"....."

"....."

The language comprehension area of her brain was definitely damaged.

".....Sorry, please say that again."

"Huhh! Really, you didn't hear? How disappointing. Listen, okay? We'll let the participants fall from the trap into a big pond filled with jelly, and then we'll have a fight against an animal in an underground arena, and then roast it whole."

It was exactly the same as the sentence from before, with no change at all.

What to be done? The President had such a self-confident smile on her face, and looked very serious about it.

"That's the plan that Layfon and I thought up!"

"!"

Layfon wanted to loudly protest, but for some reason he got scared, and couldn't even make a sound.

Samiraya had mixed together all of the things she had just discussed with Layfon. She hadn't made any choices or done any adjustments, but just piled them all up haphazardly.

(So that's why.....)

Layfon never would have imagined that the question about whether he like jelly was related to safety measures for the pitfall trap.

.....She probably felt that this counted as a safety measure.

Layfon wasn't clear on where the plan for an underground arena fight with an animal had come from. She had thought of the word 'underground' from the pitfall trap, and then it had become an arena fight, and then it had mysteriously merged with the idea of roasting a whole animal, and in the end produced that result.

"How is it? Leu, don't you think that idea could work?"

"Nn."

"Huh?"

Just as Layfon had thought Leu had lightly nodded her head to expressed agreement and was about to die from shock, she said the following words with a smile still on her face.

"Instantly rejected."

"Why!"

Samiraya's cry announcing the advent of his freedom. Layfon cheered while accepting that fact.

In front of Leu's angry smile, Samiraya's proposal was just scrap.

"Really~~~~~~~~~~Why!"

She let her anger out on her pillow, throwing it forcefully against the wall.

This was Samiraya's room.

After that, Leu had worked Samiraya hard, and she had been forced into dealing with the documents that had accumulated. No, processing documents was the Student Council President's work in the first place, so Samiraya wasn't unhappy, but it was just the atmosphere that Leu's displeased face brought about, which could only be described with the word 'terrifying'. The time that passed in that situation tired out her spirit much more than usual.

So, though Samiraya got home on time, the feeling of fatigue like pulling an all-nighter made her lie on her bed unmoving.

"Really, that stupid stupid stupid stupid stupid stupid stupid Leu doesn't understand! I wanna sleep! I want to end this unlucky day with sleep. I'm gonna sleep, I'm gonna sleep!"

Samiraya shouted while picking up the pillow she had thrown against the wall, and then rolling onto the bed while holding it tightly.

"The jelly pond is definitely a good idea!"

She mumbled this while falling into a world of dreams.....

Falling downwards.....

Falling.....

.....

"Huh?"

Whoosh-

When she came to, she noticed that she was really falling.

"Huh? Huhh?"

Her ears were hearing the cartoon-like sound of falling. Though her vision was black, the feeling of the wind blowing over her skin and the weightless feeling proved that she was currently falling.

"Huhhhhhhhhhhh?"

The abnormally long fall still continued. If she fell from this high of a place... Even if it were water below, she would definitely die without a doubt..... Even as she calmly thought, she continued falling, and then.....

Splut.

A heavy but unexpected sound echoed out.

"Puah! Woah!"

It wasn't water. Some kind of wet and slippery thing with a soft and squishy surface received Samiraya, and it even tried to absorb her.

"What? What is this, it's so sweet, what kind of thing is this sweet!"

Samiraya sank into the mysterious, seemingly both liquid and solid subtance that was also very sweet as she frantically waved her arms and legs to search for a place that she could get out from.

"Huah, g..... Got it!"

Samiraya noticed that some kind of thing that she could climb up with, and she shouted out with joy, not even minding the sweet substance getting in her mouth. She grabbed the thing and climbed out.

"Puah, puah! Really, what's going on....."

A sticky feeling tightly covered her whole body. Samiraya felt annoyed while looking around.

When she did that.....

Click click click!

"Yaah!"

At the same time her voice burst out, a strong light also suddenly illuminated the surroundings. The dazzling light made Samiraya feel a bout of dizziness.

Then, a voice reverberated through the entire space.

"Then, this poor challenger has appeared tonight!"

"Huhh?"

Samiraya was surprised, because she had heard this voice before.

"Leu?"

Her eyes got accustomed to the strong light. This was actually a vast space.

"Leu? Where are you?"

The numerous beams of light that shone down from the ceiling drove off the darkness in her surroundings.

Judging from the part that was illuminated by the lights, Samiraya realized that she was in the center of a depression. The ground was quite firm, and was flat.

"Huh? This is.....?"

Samiraya wiped her dripping sticky cheeks while thinking about it.

But, the other person didn't give her time to think.

"What kind of intense fight will the victim tonight let us see? How moving will it be?"

Leu's bland voice echoed through the darkness. If Samiraya's position was the lowest point, then Leu was in the highest point by the edge.

The lights behind her made Leu's figure look black.

A group of lights covered Samiraya.

"Wuah!"

"Come, take your weapon. The festival time approaches."

Leu said this.

Samiraya suddenly noticed that there was a large man standing next to her.

"Huh? Goru?"

At some point in time, the Military Arts Head Gorneo had stood next to her.

"Come, take it."

He didn't have his usual bitter expression that was like he had eaten a lemon, but expressionlessly handed over something that was like a stick but which was also mysteriously thick, and even had many objects protruding from it.

"Huh? Huh?"

Samiraya knew that she was being forced to hold this thing. It was a club. Though it was large, it didn't feel heavy at all to the petite Samiraya.

"Huh? This is - you mean.....?"

Yes, at this point, even Samiraya couldn't continue being clueless.

This was the completed festival plan that Samiraya had discussed with Layfon, and it was exactly the same.

"Leu! So you actually really like this plan!"

Samiraya shouted this, but Leu who watched her with her head lowered and body immersed in light didn't seem to have any intention of retorting.

"Then, begin the fight."

She blandly said for the festival to begin.

In other words, Samiraya was gradually being dragged into the vortex of the festival.

"Uh, by telling me to take this, you mean.....? Huh?"

After thinking of the contents of the plan, Samiraya's face quickly became green.

This bowl-like shape was - an arena.

And, growling noises came from the area hidden by the darkness. The beams of light began moving to illuminate that portion, and the state of that area was slowly revealed.

There, was an entrance even more decorated than the entrances to the practice battlefields.

The door made noise as it opened, and then something appeared.

"That..... That's....."

The animal that seemed as if it had emerged from the darkness was exactly the same as Samiraya had imagined.

The shape of its body was like a slightly flattened sphere, and on from it grew four short legs. A big nose was accompanied by round eyes, and fangs slightly protruded from the mouth that was almost hidden by the nose.

However, its size was easily far greater than Samiraya.

"I never thought that this kind of animal would really exist."

When she had been thinking about her plans, Samiraya had once had the random thought 'It would be good if there was this kind of cute animal', but she never would have thought that the wild animal she had randomly thought up actually existed in the world.

The round-eyed beast seemed somewhat anxious after it was brought inside, but the arena workers still managed to get it in front of Samiraya.

"Bobo."

Samiraya naturally gave it a name, and even called it by that name.

The beast that had been called Bobo looked at Samiraya with its round eyes.

It didn't have any sense of hostility at all, and its lively appearance made Samiraya feel grieved.

However, she had to fight with Bobo.

"How could I, I couldn't fight with Bobo."

Samiraya could only feel emotions swarming her chest, and she was about to cry.

(Sami.)

The emotions swarming her chest were far too strong, and she even heard Bobo's voice.

"Bobo."

(Please, Sami. Nothing comes from fighting.)

"Right, Bobo! I was so stupid to have those kinds of thoughts!"

(Sami.)

"Bobo!"

Samiraya hugged Bobo tightly. Its fur was rough and also prickly, and hugging it wasn't nice and warm at all.

"......It seems like it's not completely the same."

The hairs pricking her face made her euphoria die down slightly.

(Sami.....? This is?)

"Bobo?"

Bobo's appearance changed, and Sami showed a confused expression. Afterwards, Bobo's nose twitched violently from beside her.

In front of its nose was the club that Gorneo had given her.

(This is..... This smell is.....)

"Huh? Huh?"

(I couldn't be wrong. This is the smell of Popo and Lolo. How could you - Sami, what did you do with this club to Popo and Lolo - to my brothers?)

"Huh? No, I didn't do anything!"

Sami was confused. However, she felt that things were turning into a bad situation. Samiraya hurriedly shook her head to deny it.

Samiraya had just been forced to take this club. So she didn't know who had taken it before or what they had done with it.

No, but..... Right.

If there had been people holding this festival.

If Samiraya hadn't been the first person.

If there were other sacrifices who had fallen into the trap, and completed this festival.

In that situation, Bobo's companions would naturally have been turned into a feast.

Moreover, she understood that Bobo was part of that.

(You lie. Right, of course that's how it is. You plan on tricking me and making me feel safe, and then using that club to kill me. Just like what you did to Popo and Lolo!)

"I said I didn't do it!"

(I won't believe you again! I can't believe you!)

"Yaah!"

Bobo's nose rose upwards, and forcefully knocked back Samiraya's body.

"Bobo!"

(Enemy of my brothers!)

Stamping its short legs into the ground, the fangs that seemed fixed underneath the nose also flashed with a vicious light.

The friendly 'Bobo' from just before no longer existed. Now, what was there was a wild beast who wished to avenge its brothers Popo and Lolo who had been sacrificed because of the festival.

"How could this be, how could this be, how could thinks turn into this....."

Samiraya hadn't thought at all about the club held tightly in her hand, and the history housed in that thing had torn apart the friendship of her and Bobo.

"But, I was the person who thought up this idea. So, so....."

She looked at the club. It was because Samiraya had thought up this plan that the club had appeared here. Bobo had been dragged here, and its brothers had been taken to this cruel underground, and that was also as a result of Samiraya's thinking.

Because Samiraya had thought up this kind of festival.

"So, then....."

She tightly grasped the club.

(Die!)

"I can't fall here!"

Samiraya was the only person who could stop this festival.

Because-

"Because I'm the Student Council President!"

She wiped the tears spilling from her eyes, and came forward to face the enemy in front of her.

Ten minutes later.

The club had been so light when it had just been given into her hands, but right now it was incomparably heavy.

This weight wasn't the original weight of the club, but rather it was created by the heavy feelings of Samiraya as she held it.

"Fighting is really so empty."

She murmured quietly.

The sticky jelly had become even more uncomfortable after it dried, and some was stuck to her clothes or skin, and some was gradually peeling off.

Everything had been thought up by Samiraya.

And this was the outcome that had been produced.

No.....

"It's not only me."

Right, hadn't there been someone else? Now that she had the opportunity, Samiraya thought of the guy who had made these plans.

Click!

Leu, who had disappeared in the darkness at some point, was once again bathed in light.

"Well done. Brave soul, you have succeeded in presenting a feast."

"Leu, don't do this kind of thing again!"

"No, I cannot stop. The festival has already begun. Therefore, I have to continue holding it until it ends."

"How could that be....."

After Leu asserted this with a flourish, Samiraya became speechless.

"But, this kind of painful thing should be stopped immediately."

"I can no longer be stopped, that sort of thing will not be permitted."

"Why!"

"Because the feast is right there!"

At the same time as Leu spoke, light illuminated the sacrifice Bobo who was underneath Samiraya's club.

"You couldn't be planning to use Bobo-? No, I won't let that happen!"

Bobo's exterior was exactly the same as she had imagined, though the feeling of hugging him was unfortunate. Even so, Samiraya had empathized with him, though the time had been quite short.

Even so, that ending was too cruel-

"You couldn't be thinking of eating Bobo!"

"No, we must eat him."

"Such a thing....."

"That is the law of the moving city, and more importantly, past President Karian also craves a meal."

"What did you say?"

Click!

Another beam of light illuminated an area behind Leu, an even higher elevated place.

"P.....President!"

Karian was actually there.

"Hahaha, Samiraya-san, it's been a long time."

"President, why are you here?"

"I'll always be in your hearts, like an annoying spirit."

"I'm not happy at all to hear that!"

"Then, Samiraya-san. The city doesn't have any useless resources. Livestock are raised to fill the stomachs of the people. The supplies we spend in order to raise them must be taken back in this manner. There are no useless things, and that is the same for Bobo who lies there."

Karian's words were very correct, and Samiraya couldn't say anything to oppose them.

However.....

"I believe that President Karian's words are correct, but....."

Since the time when Samiraya had still been a desk worker, she had always looked up at the figure of Karian who had saved Zuellni from its plight.

"But, I belive that substance doesn't decide everything."

Karian's decision had been very correct, and it was why the Academy City Zuellni had been able to escape the disastrous crisis of having no selenium mines.

"We can't blindly use up the things that President left us. I only want to let everyone understand that other than substance and money, there are other things that need to be cherished just the same. I want to let everyone know just how important the friends they have here and the six years that they will pass together are."

Right.

She couldn't thank Karian enough. It was because he was here that Samiraya was able to realize her student life, and imagine becoming the Student Council president like this.

However, it was also because of this that Samiraya had to let him see, with his own eyes, an Academy City with a different style from his efficiency and materialism.

She wanted to send those emotions to Karian.

"So I succeeded your position."

"Well....."

After holding Samiraya's gaze, Karian pondered.....

Clap.....clap.....

He slowly clapped his hands.

"Incredible."

"President....."

"If that is your answer, if that is your goal, then I certainly give it to you."

"Th.....Thank you."

Karian had recognized her.

"However, might everything already be too late?"

"Huh?"

"Because you see-"

Due to Karian's urging, Samiraya looked backwards.

"Hooray, hooray."

That terrible sound came to her ears.

"Huh?"

And then, there was crimson..... a crimson flame.

Along with Bobo, whose four legs had all been tied with rope and hung upside-down from an iron rod.

The crimson flame was roasting Bobo.

"Hooray, hooray."

Layfon, Nina, even Gorneo and Leu were surrounding the flame, and dancing some indescribable dance.

"Uh, wait!"

"I said you couldn't roast Bobo!"

Just as Samiraya shouted this, she woke up from the dream.

"......Ah, it really was a dream?"

The following day.

The times for going to school and attending classes had already ended, and right now was time for school to let out.

Leu who had entered the Student Council President's room first noticed the remains of yesterday's work still on the table. They were the rejected festival plans, and the formally completed files had indeed been sent to the desk workers.

"A festival, huh....."

She murmured this.

Indeed, if everything were handed over to the people of the Business department to manage, even a festival with cultural significance would be painted in the colors of business.

".....Should we think of something to do?"

Leu murmured this again. Just as she was tidying up the table, Samiraya came in.

"Hey hey hey, Leu!"

The Student Council President was lively today as well.

"Regarding the festival you talked about yesterday....."

"Right! I also wanted to talk about that."

"Ahh, nn. What about it?"

"The idea yesterday, I thought about it for the whole night....."

The idea from yesterday had been truly terrible. Even Samiraya realized that it wouldn't work after calmly thinking about it.

Leu thought so.

"Don't you think that idea really could work?"

Samiraya said those words with a serious face.

"Shut up."

Even if they wanted to hold a festival, they definitely couldn't let Samiraya manage it.

Leu made that decision.

With Sports

The orders of priorities were decided based on many factors.

So, things were delayed because of those many factors.

"I say....."

"Don't say it."

Noticing the bad atmosphere that Leu was giving off, Samiraya quickly interrupted her.

"We can't do anything about it. Right, we can't do anything."

"How can we not do anything?"

But, she still couldn't completely defend against Leu's cold gaze and malice.

"Uuu."

"We've been busy with work recently."

"R.....right right."

"And the person in charge doesn't look over the process either, and someone could smoothly participate even with some rough spots in their application information."

"Yeah, that's really scary!"

"Nn, truly scary."

Leu nodded her head with a straightforward expression. She had changed the target of her anger - thinking this, Samiraya relaxed her breath.

However, things obviously weren't like that.

"But-"

Leu's eyes flashed from behind her lowered glasses, and then she gripped Samiraya's head.

"Even so, what do you mean by lazing around until the manager of affairs ran over to ask me 'Is the President going to attend the athletic assessment soon?'?"

"Aauuu....."

The natural failure of her glossing-over tactics made the other students in the surroundings look over curiously.

(Uuu, don't look at me like that~)

Samiraya, who was being gripped by Leu, held her head in her hands.

It was the new semester when Samiraya had just become the Student Council President - and new students would be entering the campus these few weeks, and it was also an empty period without any big activities, other than the student-wide athletic assessment being held.

Of course, in the Academy City, 'student-wide' meant all of the residents, so it wasn't a simple activity that could be finished within a day.

So, the rules set forth by the person in charge of the athletic assessment this time were - regardless of what class or club you belonged to, you could register in the name of your society or register as an individual. During this activity, everyone could feely participate in the athletic assessment during the set times.

If everyone had to register individually, there would be many people skipping out on this activity. But, there weren't many people who were completely by their self and who didn't belong to any group. After all, the students of the Academy City would at the least belong to some department, grade, or class groups.

Today was the final day of the athletic assessment.

"This is a problem."

"Uuu."

Samiraya could only moan as Leu scolded her.

"I even believed that you would definitely participate with some group."

"Uh, I wanted to go, I did want to go."

"You were almost announced in the list of people who didn't participate. Do you realize that?"

"Auuu....."

"A leader like the Student Council President can't set a bad example, right?"

"Uu, sorry."

If the person in charge had done things by the book, Samiraya's name would definitely be listed on there.

"But that person noticed it in the end. Huh, maybe that means that I'm unexpectedly famous?"

"When you open your mouth to say the word 'unexpectedly', everything's already over."

"Yaah!"

Leu completely shattered Samiraya's resistance. Samiraya, changed into athletic clothing, listlessly sat on the bench in front of the lockers.

"Don't fall asleep there, hurry up and go."

"Leu, what about you?"

Leu was also in front of the lockers, but didn't seem to be changing clothes.

"I finished long ago. You see....."

"I- don't- wanna- go---"

Though these were words spoken from her heart, in front of Leu they were just empty cries.

"Weren't you the person who decided to have everyone do this kind of thing?"

"Auu!"

Those timely words were undeniable.

The athletic assessment's original goal was to raise the average athletic ability of the students. The focus of this activity wasn't to determine who was good at what event.

That was how things were, in terms of the goal of the athletic assessment.

However, for an individual, that wasn't the case.

"Agyaaa!"

Samiraya challenged the sit and reach while making strange sounds.

".....I see."

After the girl supervising the recording took the results, Leu said this with a cold voice, with her anger having completely disappeared:

"I probably could have guessed, but I never thought you would be this bad."

Her movements had stopped when her fingers had barely passed her knees.

"Shut up!"

"Nn, sorry. I was wrong."

"You should sympathize with the unathletic! You stabbed my heart!"

Samiraya shouted this, teary-eyed.

Correct, Samiraya wasn't very good at sports, even passing the level that could be described as 'not very good'.

"My body wasn't made to move."

"Does that kind of organism actually exist?"

"Yes, it's right here!"

"That kind of thing isn't anything to be proud of."

"Anyway, what use are things like assessments?"

"They're for setting the standards of the physical education classes."

"Something like the average isn't interesting at all to an individual. Even if I were told 'this is the average, so you also have to be like this', I still can't do things I can't do."

"Saying that is a bit unreasonable~"

"Things like sports should just be given to the Military Artists to do!"

Samiraya vented everything out as loud complaints. Because she wasn't very good at sports, she had been believed by many to be very 'slow' or 'useless', but actually that wasn't the case. Even if she wasn't good at sports, it didn't affect her personality.

Samiraya loudly delivered that argument.

"Well then."

However, Leu's voice was very cold after hearing that speech.

"What?"

"If you truly want to talk about things, who decided to hold this athletic assessment?"

"Auu."

"There were people who said, the assessment will be troublesome, it won't be much help for the physical education

classes, so we should have no reason to force that kind of thing, but who was the person who had firmly opinionated that we should do it?"

"B.....Because the person opposing it was Roderick..... You know too, that guy will oppose everything."

"Because he believes that it's his duty to raise the opposing opinion. But, Sami was the one who firmly wanted to do it."

"Guaah!"

"Isn't it a bit odd for a person to do that but be complaining left and right about everything now?"

"I don't even have the qualifications to be a person!?"

Leu mercilessly went on the offensive, making Samiraya crumble.

"In any case, you can't escape anymore, so do your best."

"Where are you going?"

"This activity will lend today, so I'm going to ask the workers whether they'll need help when it's time to clear things away. Other than that, I'll take the opportunity to compile other problems if there are any, and this way the next time it'll be easier to find a solution the next time we run into a similar problem."

"Leu's amazing."

"This is very normal."

"Leu, do you want to start being the President from now on?"

"I decline."

After expressing her refusal in a cold tone, Leu left.

"Uuu."

After being left alone here, Samiraya looked around the sports field. There were still many things she had to do - essentially, many things she had to show her ineptitude at.

As the Student Council President, she believed that the athletic assessment was something that had to be prepared, however.....

"I want to cry."

As an individual, she really still didn't want to do this, Samiraya thought.

She felt that she had let out all of the groans in the world.

"Haah....."

Samiraya who had been unable to complete all of the tests before noon sighed as she sat on the grass field.

In her hand was the lunch and sports drink that Leu had bought .

But, she didn't have any appetite at all. Samiraya just continuously sighed while sipping the sports drink.

Students who were in their noon break were scattered around on the grass like Samiraya.

No one was as exhausted as Samiraya.

"Isn't it strange to be this tired after just doing the athletic assessment?"

Actually, no one said anything like that, but just thinking about those words made her mad.

But, there was some sort of feeling of partial emptiness.

"It's lonely when Leu's not here to nag....."

Leu really was busying herself talking to the workers.

"I feel like she's the most serious person."

No, Samiraya also felt that she was very serious, but she still felt that everyone in the Student Council rather depended on the all-encompassing strength of Leu.

"Ah, in the end I'm dependent on her too."

Samiraya didn't resent or envy Leu because of this.

She just wanted to become able.

Just as Samiraya was thinking about those matters, she noticed that someone was sitting down next to her.

"Nn?"

It was a girl.

She was very pretty.

"A first-year?"

"Yes, Student Council President."

Samiraya had only unconsciously spoken to herself, but that girl hadn't missed those words, and had made a reply.

"Oh, you know who I am?"

There were still many first-years who didn't know who the Student Council President was.

"Didn't the President make a greeting speech during the entrance ceremony?"

"Uh, nn, that's right."

Samiraya had fallen asleep during her own entrance ceremony, so she didn't remember who the Student Council President had been at the time.

She laughed dryly, and then looked at the girl.

"Did you come by yourself?"

"Yes."

"Really, you seem like someone who would be surrounded by many people."

"I looked into many things. Though I felt sorry for them, I still refused the solicitations of those people."

"Oh.....?"

Samiraya didn't really understand. But, she was probably saying that she was very busy with many things after entering school.

That should be the case, but-

"Could you be not very good at sports?"

"No, I'm not bad."

"What."

Samiraya had been kind of expecting to meet a companion, but after hearing that answer, she let out a bored sigh.

"But, maybe. I only pushed it to the last day because I felt it was troublesome."

"Huh?"

"In order to attend the activity, there were some preliminary tasks that I had to carry out."

"Really?"

The way this girl spoke was a bit hard to understand, Samiraya casually thought.

"Meaning that you have an event you're not very good at, so you wanted to practice first?"

"No.....Nn, maybe. That's close to the truth. But rather than practice, it's preparation."

Samiraya didn't really understand the difference between the two, but since she had said so, that was probably how things were.

"Preparation, huh? I guess that's expected to deal with things you're not good at."

"I believed that there were reasons to take countermeasures."

"Yeah."

But in the end, what did preparation for an athletic assessment of the body's abilities mean?

Developing an exercise routine?

The thought 'so annoying' instantly emerged in Samiraya's mind, but that reaction also made her feel that she was truly useless in this aspect.

"Hey, do you have any way to overcome things that you're not good at?"

"Things you're not good at?"

"Nn."

Samiraya asked this naturally.

"It's not too good to stay bad at things you're not good at, so I think I should make some progress towards a certain level."

"In other words, the average."

"Nn."

"Does the Student Council President need something like an average?"

"Huh?"

"Average means you have no particular extraordinary abilities. If you want to deal with the affairs of the Student Council President, won't it be very troublesome to have no particular extraordinary abilities?"

"Nn, ah - that's true."

"Assuming the average is zero, suppose someone has negative one hundred in an event-"

"Nnnn?"

"If that person wants to reach the average position, he just needs to get a hundred in one event to raise his average to zero, or get a total of one hundred in other events, right?"

"Nn? Nn?"

The manner of speaking that this girl used was really hard to understand. Samiraya thought for a long while about the meaning of that speech.

"Uh, meaning that it's fine as long as there are other things I'm good at?"

"That's right, I believe that political experts have no need to be military experts as well."

"Hm."

After the short, strange manner of speaking came a commonplace encouragement.

But, it didn't feel bad.

"Yeah, I wanted to hear someone else say something like that. Nn, not bad."

She wanted Leu to encourage her with those words.

'Leu also has a weakness in that area.'

After thinking this, Samiraya's mood changed.

The noon break time was about to end.

"Thanks, uh....."

"I'm Vati, it was a pleasure to talk with you."

"Nn, then see you."

After parting, the two went their separate ways.

Samiraya still groaned again and again, but she no longer felt embarrassed like before the noon break. Also, after she stopped concerning herself with the people watching her, her body's movements ended up better than she expected.

"How's that!"

She showed off the assessment sheet in front of Leu, with a completely different mood from before the noon break.

"Uh, even if you ask me how it is....."

Leu, who had waited until the end, took the assessment sheet with a quite intrigued expression.

"I've grown!"

"R.....Really?"

Leu showed an expression of being unable to keep up with Samiraya's momentum, and lowered her gaze to the assessment sheet.

Samiraya was full of self-confidence.

"......Can I tell the truth?"

"Nn!"

"Frankly, I feel this is terrible."

"Puah!"

"Your aggregate score is below average."

"Aaah!"

"And anyway, I don't know about Samiraya's previous assessments, so I don't know about whether you've grown."

"Guah!"

Leu's words were merciless.

Though her words were merciless, her tone had a considerate air, but that just strengthened the pain of her words stabbing Samiraya's heart.

"Uuu, but everyone said I worked very hard....."

If she thought calmly, she realized that Leu's words weren't wrong, so Samiraya couldn't say anything to deny them. Samiraya hung her head in disappointment.

"......Ah, but - the only meaning of these results is for records purposes."

"Leu?"

"You think you worked hard, right? Therefore, that's enough, right?"

Leu lightly placed her hand on Samiraya's head.

Leu showed a helpless smile. Samiraya really liked that smile of hers.

After seeing that expression, Samiraya's mood bettered itself in a flash.

"Come on, hurry up and change your clothes. There are still a lot of chores we have to deal with."

"Yaah!"

However, Leu was really still merciless.

Even if she said she was very tired, it was ineffective. Samiraya was towed back to the Student Council building without any further explanation.

Later, one assessment caught many people's attention.

There was a student[5] who managed to get exactly average for all of the events.

However, the average was the average, and it wasn't unusual or compelling. After the workers discussed it a little amongst themselves, they forgot all about it.

No one knew whether that was her goal or not.

Machina's Eye

Vati Len was just a single person.

If you asked her whether she lacked sociability, you would get an answer that seemed both intriguing and ordinary.

For example, the situation with her classmate Shay (Male, fifteen years old).

During their first encounter.

"Ah, nice to meet you, I'm Shay. I'm from the Windswept City Genilla."

"Nice to meet you, I'm Vati Len. I was born in the Calm Sea City Pushias. My address is 30481 Karsang town, and I'm the eldest child of a five-person family. Female, fifteen years old, my height is one hundred and fifty eight centimeters, my weight is....."

"Uh, you don't have to go into that much detail, thank you!"

During class.

"Ah, my eraser!"

"Your eraser fell, huh."

"Sorry, could you grab it for me?"

"Understood. Teacher, in order to pick up the eraser of Shay-san in the neighboring seat, I must temporarily leave my seat."

"Nn? Oh."

"I will probably need to leave my seat for three seconds, may I ask if this will be of any concern?"

"Nn, pick it up quickly."

"No, it will be impossible for me to shorten the time I must leave my seat under three seconds."

"......Well, just pick it up."

"Alright..... I have picked it up, sorry to interrupt your class."

".....Nn."

"Here you go, Shay-san."

"Th.....Thank you."

During confession.

"What did you call me to this kind of place for?"

"It seems like I love those strange qualities about you, please go out with me!"

"What do you mean by strange qualities?"

"Are you mad? Sorry. But I think you're very charming that way ."

"No, I'm not mad. But, please tell me what those 'strange' parts you feel are so I can use that as reference later."

"Uh, that..... Everything..... No no no, even everything you do - hold on, do you want me to talk about the parts that don't need to be explained....."

"What do you mean by 'parts that don't need to be explained'?"

"I don't mean anything bad by saying this. I think that you're very charming that way....."

"That kind of thing doesn't matter. In what way am I strange? Could you tell me simply?"

"Huh? Uh, that....."

"Do you have time? If possible, I want to listen to your opinion, so please don't hold anything back."

"Sorry, it's too much for me to handle!"

Like that, Vati wouldn't refuse to communicate with others, but her responses easily made other people feel strange. In addition, the pubescent male students who were now free after leaving their parents also noticed her beauty, and the situation was highlighted even further because they confessed to her.

Recently, everyone had already begun believing 'Vati Len is strange'.

"....."

Vati thought.

"What is this?'

She didn't feel unhappy. However, she was unable to understand the relationship between the flurry of guys who had confessed to her and her public image afterwards.

She understood that a girl's looks were one of the main reasons encouraging male feelings. She could understand that males would confess to her because of this..... It was an action having to do with wanting to establish certain male-female relationships. But , why had their appraisals of her become 'she's a strange person' afterwards.....?

"Why is that?"

She asked the store owner as she was working, who was also a senpai one year above her and who also lived in the same apartment - Meishen.

"Hahaha....."

Meishen could only show a troubled smile.

This was the cake store where Vati worked.

Inside the kitchen of the cake store that had been remodeled from a floor of the apartment, the two of them were making cakes. Other than the kitchen, there was also a small eating area and a display counter where slices of cakes had been placed, but those places weren't used often. Meishen's cake store was near the warehouse district, and there was a good distance from the busy area where students congregated, so there weren't many customers who came here directly to buy. The main source of this store's income was signing contracts with other stores to sell them cakes.

Meishen had only started preparing this store late last year, and this year it had just opened this year, but just from the start this store had already gotten many decent results.

"Manager, do you also think I'm strange?"

"You don't need to call me Manager, call me Meishen."

"No, please let me call you Manager here."

The two of them made cakes while conversing. Though the store had just opened, they would talk like this while working if they weren't making new products.

Though that were true, the work of making new products and distributing them still had to be completed before school started, so they actually were pretty busy. The two of them carried out the conversation in short snippets.

"I do think that your manner of speaking is a bit strange, but I don't think you're a strange person. I think you're very serious."

"I'm very serious?"

"Nn. When you encounter something you don't understand, you'll want to make sense of it, right?"

"Nn, that's true."

"I think Vati's very serious about that."

Though Meishen was shy, she was already used to being with Vati since Vati was helping with the store and also lived in the same apartment as she did.

"Thank you."

After thanking Meishen, Vati once again began working while continuing to think.

But, if it were like that, did that mean her classmates didn't believe Vati was a 'serious person'?

From where had that discrepancy arisen? Meishen's remarks were the feelings that she expressed after hearing Vati's words, but her classmates' thoughts were evaluations they had obtained after actually seeing Vati's actions.

Was that where the difference was? In that case, were the classmates the correct ones?

However, Meishen's feelings should also be the comprehensive evaluation she had reached using all of the experiences she had with Vati up through now. In that case, Vati couldn't one-sidedly say that her thoughts were wrong, right?

The actions she had taken up to now under the identity Vati Len had caused her classmates to think of her as a strange person, but Meishen believed she was serious.

What kind of factors had caused those differences? The answer wasn't apparent.

As she thought hard about those things, today's cake-making work ended.

Incidentally, she would want to make sense of things she didn't understand.

Meishen had also said that. But, that was the current Vati. That was true regardless of whether it was to perfect her mimicry program or for some other reason.

"I'll go over the situation again."

She was in class right now, and Vati murmured with a quiet voice that wouldn't allow anyone to hear it. Maybe Shay who sat next to her had heard her talking to herself a bit, as he looked at her with a timid expression, but Vati decided to ignore his reaction .

How did the evaluations of Meishen and her classmates differ? Meishen's feelings were the comprehensive evaluation she had issued of her view of Vati, and her classmates' opinions were the same.

In other words, the things Meishen and her classmates saw were different?

(Maybe that's right.)

In order to keep from frightening Shay, Vati stopped talking to herself. If she controlled her mimicry program, the words in her heart wouldn't 'leave her mouth naturally'. She could maintain the appearance of being in class while calmly thinking.

(The things they see aren't the same. Right, that's it.)

Even in she were with her classmates for more than half of each day, the Vati that her classmates saw was only the appearance of her listening to lecture like usual. They almost never saw Vati after school was over.

Other than this, they also saw the guys who had confessed to her.

Moreover, Meishen hadn't witnessed that.

In other words, the classmates had seen the males who confessed to Vati, so they had evaluated her as a 'strange person'? Though that thought still left some doubts as to why she was a ' strange person'.....

(Meaning that among males and females of this age, relationships with the other gender are very important?)

Vati had received the confessions, but hadn't gone out with any of the males, and was still single. Looking at it from that angle, she was indeed a 'strange person'.

But, in that case.....?

(Then, what will become of him and her?)

Vati meant Layfon and Meishen. Meishen indeed had feelings for him. According to the information supplied by Meishen's childhood friends Mifi and Naruki, Meishen had had feelings for Layfon almost since she entered school. But a whole year had almost passed, and there hadn't been any developments between the two.

In the eyes of their class's students, was that also 'strange'?

(Is it?)

After coming to this city, Vati had always been observing her. She didn't have any abnormalities as a person. In other words, was the personality unrelated with ability to communicate with the opposite gender?

(.....But if that's true, I will have to consider changing the target of observation.)

Vati had come to the Academy City with a certain goal, and had chosen Meishen as a qualified person. However, if Vati's choice were mistaken, then she would have to change her choice of person. Vati didn't have much time left, and if she had to change, then it would be best to decide as early as possible.

(Before that, I have to confirm something.)

After making up her mind, Vati quickly took action.

During the noon break, Vati walked to the second-year school building.

If Vati put her mind to it, she could effortlessly learn the current location of anyone.

That day, the target person was sitting on a park bench eating lunch with a fat classmate.

"Ah, Vati. What's up?"

Layfon felt curious about why the first-year Vati had shown up in a park near the second-year school building.

"I came to ask you a question."

"Really? You haven't eaten lunch yet, right? In that case, let's eat together."

"Okay."

After seeing the bento box in Vati's hand, Layfon said this, and Vati also followed along with that proposal.

"......Huh, this girl is?"

The fat classmate sitting next to Layfon asked this.

"She's Vati, who lives in the same apartment as I do. This is Ed."

"Nice to meet you."

"Ah, yeah."

Vati sat down next to Layfon, and Ed welcomed her with confusion.

"Then, what did you want to ask me?"

Next to Layfon was placed a bento box with the same appearance as Vati's but a different size, and other than that, a bento from the same bento store as Ed's was also stacked on top of

it. That bento box was Meishen's. Today, Meishen was the one in charge of making food. Though she didn't have to even make lunch as well, she had just done that on her own. Meishen wouldn't do that if she were busy her cake store's work.

There were no new products today, and the flavors hadn't changed much, so Meishen had probably just done that on a whim . Though Vati could observe Meishen's actions, it was hard to observe her feelings at the time.

"So, what's your question?"

After opening Meishen's bento, Layfon asked this.

"Nn, Is Layfon-senpai going out with any girl?"

"Pwah!"

Layfon and Ed simultaneously ejected the food in their mouths.

"Wh.....What? Why are you asking that so suddenly?"

"I heard that Layfon-senpai has quite a good standing among the platoon members of the seventeenth platoon, and you also have a very good reputation among the female students. I'm a bit uncertain as to why senpai is so popular yet isn't going out with any girl."

"I see, that's indeed true!"

Ed nodded his head vigorously.

"Hurry up and find someone to go out with, and then introduce her friends to me!"

It seemed like Ed was also in line with Vati's standards, a man with normal sensibility.

"Look at Ed-senpai, that's the reaction of a normal male."

"Uu!"

After noticing that he was isolated, Layfon couldn't help but feel cornered.

"Layfon-senpai's contact with girls and the feelings that girls have for senpai are far greater than for Ed-senpai, but Layfon-senpai isn't going out with any girl."

"......Uh, saying things that plainly makes me feel like tears are endlessly streaming from my eyes."

"Why is that?"

Vati ignored Ed's reaction, and continued asking.

"Even if you ask me..... why....."

"Does Layfon-senpai not have a favorite girl?"

"That's not it....."

"Why is that? A normal male in Layfon-senpai's situation would be going out with his favorite girl, right?"

"Uh, no, how should I say it....."

"And then once you start going out, you'll be want to peer into the depths of male-female relations, right? Does Layfon-senpai have no interest in that kind of thing?"

"Vati....."

Layfon had originally seemed troubled, but those words from Vati made his expression change. Layfon faced Vati with a solemn expression.

"What is it?"

"Girls can't say that kind of thing whenever they want."

"Really? I believe that not only males feel interest in male-female relations."

"Maybe, but you still can't."

Layfon refuted her once again.

"Why?"

"Because if girls do that kind of thing, they might become pregnant. What would you do if you were pregnant in this kind of place? You'd have to take a roaming bus when you graduated, right? Not only that, you'd have to make child support payments while you studied. Since you might not be able to stay in the academy city without taking classes."

"......You're thinking really seriously."

"......Because there were similar kids in the orphanage."

Ed showed an admiring expression, but Layfon next to him showed a bitter face as if he had remembered something.

"I see, I understand."

Vati nodded her head, and afterwards the two of them finished eating Meishen's bentoes with surprising speed, and then left the area.

She understood Layfon's thoughts. His calm consideration of societal relations had allowed him to keep male-female relationships at arm's length. Perhaps one could say that as long as his societal state wasn't complete, he wouldn't think of himself as a man. Was it because of this that he was able to continue his slow attitude towards female outreach?

Then, what about Meishen?

What did she think?

If Meishen had similar thoughts as Layfon, then she wouldn't take action, right?

But, Vati would be troubled if that were the case.

Meishen had to take action.

How could she make her take action?

There was a need to carry out experiments.

If the person herself were used for an experiment, things would be very troublesome once a situation arose.

Therefore, she had to search for similar experimental subjects, and then search for individual effective means..... Vati once again gathered information from the entire Academy City, and then retrieved the contents. And, she found it.

She found an experimental subject, along with a way to carry out the experiment.

Naruki kept running.

A good amount of time had already passed since the City Police Psychokinesist contacted her. The waste of time made a bitter expression emerge on Naruki's sweat-covered face, as she charged into the department.

"I'm sorry!"

Her colleagues were already waiting, and Formed who was in front of everyone staring at a file in his hand looked towards Naruki.

"You still haven't found Layfon?"

"I'm sorry, we weren't acting together."

"Nothing we can do about it, we can't use the broadcasting system to call him here either. Hurry up and get prepared."

"Yes!"

After replying with that, Naruki rushed towards the equipment room.

The electricity-producing Mechanical Department of the moving city had a purification system to support the living environment above along with the shelters and other facilities, and this took up almost all of the underground space of the moving city. But other than that, there were also other facilities underground.

For example, there were areas where roaming buses were repaired or taken apart. In emergency situations - emergency situations where the lift going up and down to outskirts of the city couldn't be used - roaming buses would stop entering this underground area or depart from it.

Something strange had happened in this underground area.

The police had received a report that there was a fugitive bandit group that had snuck into this underground area.

Because they received briefing books that other roaming buses sent, the City Police knew that the group was among the group of outsiders who had arrived. After they had disappeared from the area where outsiders were received, the police had begun to launch a search, and had discovered that they were hiding inside that underground area.

"The bandit group plans on repairing the roaming buses that are stopped in the underground area waiting for maintenance, and obtaining a means of moving independently. We have to catch them before that."

"Yes sir!"

After Formed finished talking, the members of the SWAT team issued a response in unison. Naruki who had already changed her outfit was also among them.

The team moved quietly.

There was an entrance to the underground inside the City Police department. It was so that they wouldn't obstruct the movement of normal civilians during an emergency, but could also let the police enter important facilities directly without tipping off criminals.

The team used this passageway to advance underground.

"Speaking of which, I still haven't asked you about that matter."

The team gave off an awe-inspiring tense atmosphere as they advanced through the passageway. In that atmosphere, Formed quietly asked this of Naruki:

"Why did you leave the platoon?"

"That....."

"You could have been on both sides and easily raised your strength."

"Yes."

"Why, then?"

Formed believed that it was a natural question. Actually, it was as he said; Naruki's strength had increased after attending the platoon training, and she had used that strength in her City Police work.

More importantly was that there was no Military Arts competition this year, so she wouldn't be as busy as last year.

Even so, Naruki had still resigned from the platoon.

"Ah, if you don't want to say, I won't force the question."

"Sorry....."

"If there's something built up in your heart that you feel troubled about, just tell me. At the least I can listen to you."

"Thank you."

The restraints that she felt deep inside her heart felt slightly alleviated.

Just as the two of them conversed about this, the team reached their destination.

Before them was a large metal door. Looking at it from another angle, this door was just a normal wall.

Because of the preliminary inspection of the Psychokinesist, the police already had some degree of understanding of the position and condition of the bandit group repairing the roaming bus. Naruki once again thought silently of the suppression operation that had been planned using that data as a basis while quietly activating her Kei vein. If she released too much Kei, the enemies would notice, so Naruki carried out furtive movements while making sure not to do that.

Layfon had once said that she needed to be able to hold back her Kei presence at any time, but Naruki still couldn't do that even now. However, after the platoon training, the time it took for her to activate her Kei vein had shortened, and the speed at which she compressed her Kei and its instantaneous strength had also increased greatly.

Though it hadn't been a full year, she had truly learned many things from the platoon.

Even so, Naruki had resigned from the platoon.

One of the team members slowly opened the lock, and then put his hand on the doorhandle. Formed who stood next to the door gestured wordlessly, signaling the beginning of a raid.

The door was opened in a flash, and the raid team's Military Artists slipped through the gap that appeared in twos and threes, with the Psychokinesist following behind them.

Naruki was the third to enter the underground area, and she ran towards the roaming bus that was currently being repaired.

A part of the outer layer of the roaming bus had been torn off, and the drive system that was exposed was currently being repaired. The several men with tools in their hands looked over in surprise. Judging by their slow reactions, these people weren't Military Artists.

In that case.....

Naruki threw out her restored rope. After the Karen Kei training that Naruki had carried out with Gorneo who Layfon had introduced, she was able to make the rope move through midair like a snake. It tied all of the workers in a bundle.

And then was.....

External-type Kei, Karen variant - Amethyst Lightning.

The Ruby Dite made Naruki's Kei flow become electricity. The electricity, whose power had been regulated, caused the workers to fall unconscious.

"Next!"

Naruki sensed that she had held back from killing the enemies, and searched for the next target. There had been ten members forming the bandit group, and half of them were Military Artists. Naruki rushed towards the roaming bus while using her voice to confirm the situation of the others. The sounds of clashes happening in the underground district reached her ears. Had the Military Artists all been assigned nearby to keep watch?

(From the left, three people!)

Naruki reacted to the Psychokinesist's sharp voice. Three Military Artists jumped out from the shadow of an abandoned roaming bus.

Naruki raised her baton and rope to engage the three of them.

Only a few minutes had passed from the start of the raid until the end, but the heat of the moment left a strong feeling of lingering aftermath in the underground area.

"Haa."

While watching the captured men being taken out one by one, Naruki slowly exhaled.

"You've worked hard."

Her shoulder was patted. Looking backwards, she could only see Formed showing a very happy expression. The City Police had no obligation to compensate the other cities that the bandit group had stolen from. That was not only because it was time-consuming if they wanted to communicate with other cities, but there were also big problems with methods of transport. If there were things that absolutely had to be returned, the normal method would be to visit the other party directly to sell them back. Regardless of whether the things had been bought or stolen from cities they had been in before, everything would become the property of the Academy City.

It wasn't his own pockets that were being lined, but Formed felt happy because of this.

When she had just started, Naruki had not only felt doubtful about that sort of reaction, but even felt that it was very strange.

"But, this place has been made into a mess."

As if to banish the emotions that had appeared from her heart, Naruki looked around. The roaming bus that had been half-repaired was overturned on the ground, and pieces of the bus's outer layer were fallen everywhere on the ground. The leaking oil was forming a black puddle on the floor that had been dirtied by soot.

The Military Artists who had attacked Naruki had been very strong, perhaps even stronger than Naruki. But, Naruki had

trained with an extraordinarily strong Military Artist like Layfon every day, along with the platoon members who were all much stronger than she was - Nina, Sharnid, and Dalshena, so she understood how to fight with enemies stronger than she was.

Naruki stalled for the whole time, and after the other police Military Artists finished their suppression and came to back her up , those enemy Military Artists were safely and easily captured.

But, because Naruki had spent so much time, the state of the surroundings had become this bad.

"Don't be concerned. In any case, every roaming bus here is waiting to be dismantled, so even if we create some damage no one will get mad."

Formed's happy laughed reverberated around the surroundings , but right then, Naruki with a more subdued attitude heard a strange sound.

The sound had come from above Naruki and Formed.

Other than several air ducts, there was a cement ceiling divided into regions, along with metal frames that separated them.

Most people would be unable to clearly see the composition of the ceiling due to the impedance of the strong lights. However, relying on a Military Artist's vision, it was possible to find the source of that strange sound.

Moreover, the moment when Naruki noticed something was wrong, the result that the strange sound brought about was being realized before her eyes.

The ceiling was collapsing.

"Watch out!"

Naruki managed to call out in the nick of time, but her voice gave the other Military Artists adequate time to react. As the Military Artists carried the nearby ordinary people and retreated, Naruki also carried Formed at the same time.

But, the scope of the collapse was quite broad, and Naruki and Formed were almost in the center. At a speed that would ensure the safety of Formed's body, she couldn't escape to a safe range in time.

After making that judgment, Naruki rushed into the overturned roaming bus without looking back.

She lost consciousness for a moment.

"Where is this?"

Formed's voice made her return to her senses. No, she hadn't lost consciousness, she had just been temporarily dazed by the sudden darkening of her surroundings.

Steel beams struck each other, and heavy and sharp noise engulfed them. When that sound passed, the surroundings were quiet enough to make their ears hurt.

The surroundings had become dark, and even her eyes couldn't see very clearly.

"We're inside a bus."

"Ahh, that means..... the ceiling collapsed?"

"Yes."

Naruki replied while feeling incomparably guilty. If Naruki had been able to suppress the bandit group faster, things wouldn't have become like this.

"How is it? Can we escape?"

Formed twisted his body, trying to check the surrounding environment.

"Nn....."

"Oh, sorry..... it's very cramped here."

".....Yes."

After the assault of the collapsing ceiling, the bus hadn't survived completely. Even the shell that had been taken off the front portion for repairs had been flattened, and the seating region behind Naruki's back had also been crushed flat.

In that kind of situation, it could even be said that it was strange the two of them were safe and sound. But, at the same time, it meant the two of them were squeezed into a tight space where they couldn't do anything at all.

"What should we do now, then?"

"Sorry, things were too sudden....."

"No, if it were just me, I would have been crushed before getting into this situation, Ah, if we just wait here quietly, rescue workers will come to save us."

"Yes."

"So for now we just need to wait here leisurely."

The remorseful thoughts in her heart were slightly alleviated by Formed's words.

.....But, the slight alleviation of the tension also made Naruki think of something else.

(I'm so close to Chief.....)

The two of them were in sprawled out in a state where they were firmly pressed together. A seat had broken off and tilted to block the space above them, but it was because of this that they had been able to avoid being run through by the metal parts inside the bus.

Moreover, in the moment when she had protected Formed just now, Naruki had also covered him with her body. In other words, Naruki currently was lying on top of him.

(What kind of position is this!)

After thinking calmly, Naruki noticed that she was currently in a state where her face was red enough to catch flame. In order to think of some way to break out from this dilemma, Naruki focused her consciousness on the surroundings.

Creaaak.....

"Uh....."

"Naruki, it would be best not to move around recklessly right now."

"S.....Sorry."

"No, I should be the one to apologize. You must be unable to keep your balance because my stomach's too round."

"It, it's not like that."

She knew clearly that it was a joke, but Naruki couldn't laugh.

One could even say that right now wasn't time to laugh.

Not only was she sweaty all over because of the battle just now, her clothes stuck tightly to her to expose her body's curves, and even her hair was all messed up. More importantly, there was a lot of dust on her body, so her face was definitely very dirty. And to think she was so close to Formed in this condition. Aah, at the least she wanted to take a shower..... No no no, what was she thinking about!

Hurry up and calm down! Naruki shouted at herself in her heart. Right now was a tense situation, not a time to think about those things.

Ahh, but this opportunity might not appear again. Regardless of whether he was dealing with schoolwork or City Police duties, Formed was always serious and hardworking. Maybe there wouldn't be another opportunity to be alone with him like this.

(In that case, I can only take advantage of the present-)

"What is it? Worried?"

Perhaps because Naruki's impatient reaction seemed like anxiety, Formed asked this.

"No, that's not it....."

"Ah..... We won't have anything to do before the rescue team shows up, so it wouldn't be bad if you had any topic to talk about. It's unfortunate that I can't think of any good topics."

"That's not true....."

"In that case, can I ask again?"

"Ask what?"

"Your reasons for leaving the platoon."

"That....."

"I won't sugarcoat my words. And, though I said it's fine if you don't want to talk about it, I still care a lot."

".....Why is that?"

"Nn?"

"Why does Chief care that much?"

"That..... Ah, because you only joined the platoon because it was related to that event. I believed you would immediately leave the platoon, and never would have thought that you would continue on with it afterwards. But right when I was thinking that, you said you were leaving the platoon. I don't believe you would do that with a half-hearted attitude, but I care a lot about the reason you changed your mind."

It was true, that was indeed how things were. Naruki thought warmly about the events from back then. The tenth platoon had been suspected of using Kei-enhancing drugs, and Naruki had requested the help of the seventeenth platoon to investigate, and joined the platoon because of this.

In the end, Nina had single-handedly destroyed the investigation. At the time, Naruki had truly been very angry. But, she had felt that Nina's sense of justice and willpower had been truly respectable.

After the judgment of the Student Council, the tenth platoon had ended up being dissolved, and because of this a part of dirty politics had been shown. However, Naruki had no way of believing that everything was caused by Nina's dogmatic actions, and couldn't hate her because of this. After all, even if the City Police investigated smoothly, Karian - the Student Council President at the time - wouldn't have changed his judgment.

At that time, she had been unable to do anything, and it wasn't only because of Nina's independent action, but also because Naruki's strength as a Military Artist and ability as a police officer were insufficient.

Thinking of this, she decided to try joining the seventeenth platoon and try training herself again.

"But, how strong do I have to become?"

"Uh.....?"

Naruki's question made Formed tilt his head and show a confused expression.

Staying in the seventeenth platoon made Naruki realize something, which was that strength had no limits. It wasn't just because she had experienced Layfon's power first-hand. She had many experiences, like fighting filth monsters, like when they had come in contact with Grendan, and the abnormal situation afterwards - those things made her understand that regardless of how strong Military Artists became, there was still room for improvement.

That fact didn't make her feel bored of things.

However, in that case, how strong would she have to get after all in order to use her full strength as a police officer?

She didn't know the answer.

"I'm not afraid of battle. Honestly, even in the battle just now, if I had become stronger....."

"That's true. Speaking from my position, if you could have spent about three years in the platoons, and then focused on returning to your job in the police..... I thought about that before."

"Really?"

Formed had thought about her - that fact made Naruki very happy.

But, with that.....

"What is it?"

There wasn't anything around to provide lighting, so the two of them shouldn't be able to see each other's expressions. But, Formed seemed to have noticed some sort of melancholy from Naruki's body.

"No....."

"What is it, right now it's already boring enough to die here, so just say it if you're thinking about something."

"Can I?"

"Uh?"

"Can I really?"

"Nn, you can."

How much awareness had Formed said those words with? However, Naruki believed that she could only truly bare her heart here. The place right here and right now was the only place that she could speak of the feelings in her heart, she thought.

".....If I stayed three years in the platoon, wouldn't you have left here when that time came?"

"What did you say?"

"Maybe you'll say that's a half-hearted attitude, but this year is the last year you'll be here. And you'll also be transferred, so you won't always be on the frontline. I don't have much time left with you anymore."

"You....."

"I want to stay by the Chief's side. I....."

Formed seemed to have stopped breathing, which made Naruki feel incomparably tense.

He was mad - she thought.

As a policeman, Formed had held the position of the City Police chief for a long time, and on the other hand he had quite a few achievements as an Agriculture student. His actions were never half-hearted, and he always constantly advanced in the direction he believed was correct. In contrast, Naruki had resigned from the platoon right before a full year, and her reason was even love.

If it were Formed, he would definitely scold her angrily as being 'really pathetic'. After the surge of momentum that came with her love confession, Naruki closed her eyes and prepared her heart.

"Uh....."

Formed made a short hum, and Naruki's body shrank from the tension.

"Ah, you don't need to become that tense."

Unexpected words made Naruki open her eyes.

"......Chief, you're not mad?"

"Why do you think I'm mad?"

"That....."

"Ha, maybe it's because I look old."

"That's not....."

Naruki couldn't finish speaking. The sixth-year Formed would be twenty-one this year. But unfortunately, it would be natural to see him as thirty-some years old.

But, Naruki hadn't chosen Formed because of appearance.

"I was always called selfish by others."

"But, you've never taken bribes."

"That's true. But, if I can make the city wealthier, then as a result the Agricultural budget will increase. So I still have my own motives."

"That....."

"I don't want to stand tall and say that what I'm doing is right, but I don't believe that what I'm doing is wrong. Have I talked

about it? In the beginning, my wish to enlist in the City Police was just because some idiots ruined an agricultural lake that I liked. There are criminals who try to steal information in this world, but there are also bastards who purely want to dirty an agricultural lake. I only became a policeman in order to threaten those people more easily. I'm that kind of man."

"Then....."

"In other words, I'm not as serious as you think I am, nor am I as upstanding."

"That's not true."

"Ah, you're free to think what you want. In other words, I won't get mad or complain regardless of how you see me. That's what I wanted to say."

Why had the topic moved to this? No..... Because she had tensed herself to prepare her heart for a scolding, the topic had shifted. Naruki understood that.

But, this made her feel like he was being evasive.....

"Then....."

"Nn?"

"So..... uh, well....."

"Ah, I'm too good at talking about myself. Sorry."

"No, not that. That's not true....."

"But I also said just now, I'm not as serious as you think, nor am I the kind of person who would get one-sidedly angry because of other people. So I wanted to say that you don't have to worry about those things."

"Well, I already understand that. .....That's not what I wanted to ask, but rather, uh....."

Formed was actually doing this on purpose - Naruki suddenly had that thought. If he rejected Naruki's confession in this kind of situation, then it would definitely become unbearably awkward. So Formed was trying to gloss things over here and there..... After that thought emerged in her mind, Naruki's face went pale.

".....I didn't say anything that made trouble for Chief, did I?"

"Nn?"

"That's right, it just bring trouble to be confessed to by someone like me. Sorry, please forget about this."

"No, please wait."

"Chief, you don't need to be concerned about me. Before the rescue team comes to help us, I'll quietly wait here without saying anything."

"Wait wait, on the contrary, I'll be concerned if you talk like that !"

Formed's shout reverberated in the cramped space.

"But Chief, you....."

"Ahh, really! I'm sorry for the long prologue, so you don't need to feel awkward, alright?"

"But....."

"I just saw that you were mistaken about me, so I wanted to resolve that mistake. If you fit some strange rigid ideal onto me, I'll feel very troubled."

"S.....Sorry. Then as expected, Chief....."

"Listen till the end!"

In the darkness, Formed's shout that approached a cry filled the surroundings.

"I already understand your feelings. I also feel very happy."

"Then....."

"But, I only have a year left in this place. Your student life is still going to continue on, and I don't want to make you miss someone who's no long here. Also, I don't want to hold you back when you have to return to your hometown."

That speech simply sounded like a declaration that lacked sincerity.

However, even Naruki understood that reality. Because other than her lack of courage, the age gap and grade gap had been reasons she had always been troubled about regarding whether or not to confess.

Regardless of how she struggled, Formed would graduate first. And Naruki had no way of giving up on her hometown after graduating to chase after him.

It was a terrible combination.

Though that were true.....

"Even so, I don't care. As long as I can have some memories with Chief-"

Formed had deliberately said those words about him only having a year left, but Naruki viewed that as honesty. Naruki liked him because Formed was that kind of person.

Naruki relaxed her rigid body, naturally leaning her body onto Formed's.

"Hm. Though I must say, doing that is really reckless."

Though he said this, Formed still accepted Naruki, and tenderly stroked her head.

Not long afterwards, the rescue team that saved the two of them greeted them with the fact that their conversation had been heard

completely by the people outside, and they were showered with blessings and teasing whistles. But, she didn't hate that kind of feeling.

Vati Len observed everything.

Looking from the perspective of male-female relationships - The Academy City's structural defect - Vati searched for a male and female that seemed like they would never be together, but what had been returned was Naruki and Formed. And Vati had succeeded in forcing them into a situation where they were alone, and even the kind of situation that was somewhat of a crisis - the kind of situation where if she could, she would want to say everything inside her heart.

Although the event itself had been an incidental happening, it was Vati's strength that had trapped the two of them in such a situation.

"In other words, love isn't a perpetual thing?"

However, the answer she obtained in this experiment raised new questions

"......The so-called love, shouldn't it be an eternal thing?"

In terms of an individual organism spreading genetic factors and combining genes to produce an excellent offspring, it was highly risky to put all of the possibilities for leaving descendants on a single action.

On the other hand, looking at it from the point of view of an entire race, it was sufficient for the entire gene pool to produce an excellent offspring, so it could be believed that there was no reason to encourage the proliferation of a single individual's gene factors.

"In the end, what is the answer?"

New questions had arisen. In order to understand the answer to the question, Vati took more actions.

Afterwards, the Academy City had a period of time with many occurrences of people getting together or breaking up, but that phenomenon was just seen as a fad.

Regarding the Cat Soaring to the Moon

He would always pass by her during the night.

While Formed and Karian were returning home from the City Police department, they would patrol the nearby area. Considering Formed's position, he didn't have any need to do so, but he still felt that if he didn't do that, he wouldn't be himself. Before he realized, his route would deviate from the road home and onto the patrol route. As that kind of thing went on, he gradually felt that maybe he was just like that, so he resigned himself and turned those actions into a habit.

He would pass by her while on his patrol.

Moreover, it was on fixed days of the week. Even if there were deviations because of business with work, she would still be there to pass by Formed, as if she deliberately coordinated with his schedule.

Passing by.

It was just that.

Though it was just that, it still made Formed feel curious. Whether this was his intuition as a policeman, or a simple mistake, or dictated by some emotions between males and females, Formed found it hard to judge.

It could also be said that he was only curious about it because he found it hard to judge.

"After all, I'm really bad about one of those aspects."

After murmuring this, he made a wry smile.

When he met someone for the first time, the other person would definitely believe Formed to be an older person. He wasn't tall either, but his head was large, so his body proportions weren't good.

Formed also had a gut feeling that he wouldn't be attractive to girls.

But, if one were to say that he only worked hard on his job and schoolwork because he was like this, then it would be a double insult, and he believed that wasn't the truth. No no no, even that thought was..... No no, it wasn't like that..... No no no..... After thinking like that, a difficult dilemma suddenly emerged for him to think about.

Thinking about those two things separately was much easier to do. He only mixed those things up because he was still young..... Did he have those kinds of thoughts because his mental age had already caught up to his appearance.....?

Another mental labyrinth formed, so Formed banished those thoughts from his brain.

Even if he were like that, there were also people who showed interest. There was one girl who was strange like that. That happy feeling made him unable to keep from wanting to tilt his head and show a puzzled expression.

"I'm being conceited."

When he thought of the girl he passed by, a speculation about male-female sentiment unexpectedly emerged - that kind of thing was a form of conceit in the first place. He had gotten carried away because there was a girl who seemed to express interest. This didn't mean that he was an attractive man, just that the girl was strange.

Formed brought those thoughts to his own attention, warning himself. Then, what was this feeling after all? He tried thinking about it again.

Who was the girl he passed by? To Formed who had held an office in the City Police Department for a long time, investigating that matter wasn't difficult. In his career, Formed had gotten very good at remembering people's faces, and he could investigate the city's records.

After setting the first-years as his target of investigation, the answer showed itself quickly.

She was Vati Len, a first-year general studies student, and even her address was quickly found. Though the place Vati lived in was strange, it was very understandable once he thought about the fact that she was a first-year. Not knowing anything about this city, and being tricked by the cheap rent to rent a room in a strange place - every year, there were many students who regretted because of this. It wouldn't be strange if she had made such a mistake.

After knowing her residence, he could determine the areas she frequented.

Then - Formed began thinking, and a map spread out in his mind.

With Formed and Vati's activities as a prerequisite, he began thinking of possibilities why she passed by him every week. If he put his mind to investigating, Formed could quickly find out where Vati worked, but he believed that it wouldn't be too far from her nearby areas. Because people wouldn't move here and there for no reason.

"Then....."

This time, he quietly spoke out loud.

This was a possibility.

Though he was curious about what she was doing at night, the place Vati and Formed passed by each other was still within her nearby area.

Then, was he just thinking too much?

"You're thinking too much."

When he was eating lunch, a classmate of his that he hadn't met in a long time made that comment. Both of them had many things to do to prepare for graduation, so their opportunities to chat had clearly decreased a lot.

One could even say that the reason Formed honestly told this classmate he didn't see much about this matter was mostly because he long since expected him to say this.

"You think so?"

He truly was just overestimating himself, huh - Formed laughed bitterly at that inside his heart while replying.

"Is there any other possibility?"

After being asked this, an embarrassed smile emerged on Formed's face. The two of them were incredibly busy to prepare for graduation, and they didn't have time to fantasize to the ends of the earth. It was because of this that the other person cut him down mercilessly instead of the spreading the topic towards love. Hey, aren't you tired of this - His classmate, who hadn't stopped eating, asked him this with his eyes.

In addition, Formed, who had expected to be told this, said:

"Ah..... That's probably right."

"It's definitely like that. In addition - Hey, once we graduate, we won't even be living in the same city. Though I'm just saying."

"Yeah."

"How much longer are you going to do your City Police work?"

"Nn?"

"Agriculture student and Policeman, I can't tell at all which road you want to walk, because you're impressive at both."

"Really?"

"Yeah. But, you're almost going to have to adjust your direction again."

"I know."

Though he said this, Formed actually didn't really know whether he truly realized.

In order to broaden his knowledge as a researcher, Formed had left his city of birth.

However, before he realized it, he noticed that he had gotten hooked on his job as a policeman. Since things had become like that, maybe one side wouldn't go smoothly, or both would fail together. But Formed's luck wasn't bad, so he had succeeded in both simultaneously.

He also felt that he had done pretty well.

But because of this, the current Formed had trouble deciding what kind of person he would become when he returned to his home city.

Would he pursue becoming a researcher like he had wanted at the start?

Or would he choose what he had found in the Academy City - the road of a policeman.....

Perhaps his classmate who was about to graduate and who also had no choice but to prepare could see Formed's internal strife.

"It's fine."

Those words just sounded like a casual remark.

After eating lunch, the two of then quickly parted, because both were very busy. His classmate gulped down the drink in his cup as if he were washing his throat, and then left the area. After watching the other person leave, Formed also forgot about the conversation just now with a wry smile. He focused on finishing his lunch, changing his thinking to the tasks he would have to finish today.

After that, Formed didn't think of her for a long while. Not only was he busy with dealing with the research reports he would have to deliver before his graduation, his City Police work was also very busy. Though Formed was no longer burdened with onsite work, he still had to deal with many things directly in order to communicate clearly with his successors. Also, Formed was still left in this position, so he still had to deal with normal business.

Formed's degree of business was enough to make him forget about Vati, but it was very easy for him to think of her again.

He hadn't stopped the patrols that had become a habit.

When it came to that day, that night, he naturally ran into her again.

"Uh....."

Since he had completely forgotten about this matter, Formed who was patrolling like usual before returning home made a sound.

Before him was a girl walking his way.

It was Vati Len.

She was a girl with a transparent beauty.

It could be said that she seemed like a doll.

Vati walked over, her white face filled with tranquility as if it were melded with the night.

No, Formed, who was walking the other way as Vati, would just pass by without saying a thing.

That was it.

Formed had originally thought of lowering his gaze, but he suddenly changed his mind and looked upwards. If he looked down, then his vision would become poor, and he had to avoid that kind of situation from happening since he was on patrol. Though looking upwards was the same, his feelings about that were different. Looking upwards while walking and looking at the ground while walking were different.

Those two actions weren't the same - thinking this, he walked forwards.

Fortunately, the moon was out tonight, so Formed could pretend he was looking at the moon.

The moon was very large, and it hung there very clearly, as if it were an object floating in the clear black sky. Formed had a kind of feeling as if the crisp sounds drifting from the sky were washing off his dirtied heart.

Originally, Formed had just believed that if he didn't look at her , he wouldn't need to think about unnecessary things, but he hadn't thought that it would let him see this scene. He walked on, thinking that he had seen something good.

A black shadow flitted lightly across the edge of his vision.

Something was moving.

No, it was a disturbance.

That disturbance sent Formed's mind into disarray, and provoked him into focusing his senses.

It made him feel like there was something here.

However, in reality, there was nothing around.

After that, Formed investigated. Because he was unable to ignore what he had seen and treat it as if he had been oversensitive .

Vati Len didn't have anything suspicious around her. Though he felt that she was a bit strange, he still believed that she was very serious, and no strange rumors had been spread about her.

Formed judged that she was just that kind of person.

Vati didn't have anything about her that a City Policeman had to take note of.

Then, what was Formed concerned about after all?

What had disturbed his heart?

He hadn't looked at Vati, but something had made him feel concerned about her? After becoming aware of his mistake, Formed moved his gaze with a mood of wanting to click his tongue.

.....Just then, the sound of footsteps disappeared.

Because his consciousness had returned to reality and he had noticed that the surroundings were completely silent, Formed stopped his footsteps as well.

After turning his head backwards, he was surprised.

Vati was looking towards him.

Formed almost jumped in surprise, and his breath even stopped . From his current state, it already counted as very good that he hadn't let out a sound. He unconsciously kept walking and maintained a steady pace, but almost fell over.

As a result, Formed tripped where he was and caught himself clumsily. But, even if Formed showed that awkwardness in front of her, Vati still didn't say anything.

She looked over without moving at all.

No, Formed noticed that she was looking at the sky, just like he had been just now.

Was she looking at the moon?

At this point, it wouldn't be strange for Formed to hurriedly leave the scene, but he still felt very curious about Vati. What was she looking at?

It was the moon. Though his brain thought so, his feelings of still wanting to confirm the truth made Formed take action.

He followed her gaze and looked towards the sky.

As expected, there was the moon.

In addition, there were trees.

Had those been there since the beginning? The trees that grew from the sides of the roads reached their branches out towards the

road. Those tree branches became another decoration of the moonlight night.

No, there was another decoration.

Moreover, Vati might be looking at that decoration.

It was a cat.

With the moon as a backdrop, there was a cat standing on a tree branch there, forcing it to bend to its limits.

This cat had three eyes.

The object on the cat's forehead wasn't an eye, but a gem that gave off an intriguing color.

It was a black cat, but the fur that grew near the gem was white, and it depicted a pattern with a wild air.

The cat whose back faced the moon simply seemed as if it had descended from the dark night.

"You're....."

Vati who gazed upwards muttered this.

After muttering this, she noticed that the man in front of her had stopped moving. His attention hadn't been attracted by something.

Vati noticed that he was gradually moving with a speed far, far slower than her own.

"How does it feel to experience communications at the speed of light?"

A voice filled with a mischievous air didn't pass through her ears, but rather sounded directly in her mind. Vati looked at the black cat again.

"It's even faster than I can react, which means that you're no longer a human."

"Oh my, you even saw me as a human?"

"It was just a possibility."

"I see."

What kind of expression was the person deep inside that cat showing? Vati noticed that her mind was preoccupied by questions she had never thought about until now.

"In any case, what are you planning by coming this close to humankind?"

As if touching upon Vati's heart, the black cat's question poked at a sensitive area.

"Do I have a reason to explain to you?"

"You don't."

"Then, why do you risk appearing here?"

Vati asked this, but she believed that she already knew the answer.

When she speculated about the actions of this person, she could definitely conclude that her motives were curious.

What were her reasons for appearing in the Academy City in this critical juncture? She had to have a reason - Vati thought this, and that could probably be said to be a natural response.

After all, Vati hadn't hesitated to temporarily postpone her mission as Lævateinn, and she was in this kind of place collecting unnecessary information.

"Because I believe that as long as I don't do anything, you won't take any action against me. Ah, it's also the childish attitude of playing around, like 'how close can I get?'."

"So you thought you could communicate with me today?"

"Correct, that's right."

"That's absurd."

Vati tried shaking her head, but couldn't make that movement. Right now, the two of them were using the speed of light to exchange information. Vati increased the level of her senses to the speed of the conversation, but if she also increased the speed at which her body moved, what kind of outcome would be produced ?

Doing that would make her movement ability unable to keep up with the speed of light and would lead to problems.

More importantly, doing that would bring some kind of harm to the man besides her.

"It's something very important to me, and at the same time it's something that I have no reason to let others understand. Isn't the answer you're searching for also like that?"

"....."

Vati tried testing her physical responses during the lightspeed communication. That reflexive action was exactly the same as a human's. If she had a mind to eliminate it, Vati could easily eliminate that reaction, but she had deliberately chose this option.

"You're truly very interesting."

The black cat's voice sounded like she was making fun of Vati's reaction.

"I really had a hard time understanding why you want such a thing."

The cat's eyes flashed with light. Its gaze shifted to the man in front of Vati.

"In that case, you'll give up on the thing that I want."

"Correct, we'll become beings that cannot understand each other ."

"Non-intersecting parallel lines."

"Is that an attitude of giving up, realizing that the two sides will be unable to understand each other?"

"Isn't that a fact?"

"Well, humans really like using the phrase 'you can understand each other as long as you communicate'."

"It's possible that things can be resolved with discussion. But, that method is not suitable for everything."

"Oh?"

"What is it?"

"No, it was just that when I thought 'that's right' in my heart, I suddenly felt amused."

Her voice was laughing.

"That's how it is. Really, I'm almost jealous of you. No, this kind of feeling is definitely jealousy. I never would have thought there was something I still couldn't give up on. Also, I never would have thought you would know about that kind of thing."

The black cat stayed where it was.

But, the voice that entered her mind seemed like it was laughing, but at the same time seemed like it was angry. Though it sounded like it was a laugh from the heart, it was like she was using that laugh to ignore a boiling anger spilling forth, and relying on this to hide the emotion in her heart.

Erumi[6]'s intense tone shot out at the speed of light.

The cat that behaved normally, and the laughter expressing mysterious emotions. Though the two objects weren't in sync, they were the same thing.

This fact seemed confusing.

Vati felt puzzled at the intriguing feeling of acknowledging that disconnect.

This cat was just a tool she used to communication tool she used , and wasn't her real body.

However? Was that really the truth?

It had been so in the past.

But, that didn't guarantee anything about the present.

This person who had lived for a time far surpassing a normal person couldn't be a human just from a biological perspective. In that case, it couldn't be guaranteed that she still had a human form , and similarly there was no guarantee that this cat was still existing in the form of a communication tool.

In that case, was this cat the real body?

But, the cat's actions weren't coordinated with her voice, and it wasn't affected by her emotions.

It just dexterously sat on the tree branch, with the moon at its back.

"......What is your goal?"

"World peace."

"That can't be it, you alchemists....."

"What are the alchemists you know about? The name of a group ? Or the group that we originated from?"

"Of course I mean your group."

"In that case, you're definitely mistaken. Because there are problems with your sample size."

"You mean I'm wrong?"

"Regardless of what the facts are, that response of yours implies a lot of interesting meanings."

"....."

"Do you know the truth?"

"....."

"The master you serve should be one of the people belonging to that alchemist group, right? If I recall, he's called Soho? That person that Airen knows. It seems like there's some strange relationship between them, related to your outer appearance."

"....."

"When he created you, there were no alchemists other than me. I have nothing to do with your creation, so there's no way you know what alchemists are."

"....."

"Other than him."

"......There is only one master I serve."

Vati said this, stopping the black cat that was trying to voice her conclusion.

"Regardless of what you do, regardless of what you say, that fact will not change."

"......Is that so? Could he continue existing like you said just now , even in the long time you spend hiding in that space?"

The black cat didn't stop speaking.

"There's no meaning in the flesh, just the mind and the spirit. Can that master of yours who only has his flesh in the same condition after staying in that space that I maintain still count as your master?"

"Then let me ask you a question. What is this so-called mind?"

"Nn?"

"It is composed of just memories and experience, right? If there is an experience which forces the mind to undergo a large-scale change, then that person himself will also change, right?"

If a problem happened with A, then deal with it using B. If a concave problem happened, respond with convexity. The so-called mind or personality was just formed by accumulated experiences and learning that were continuously repeated starting from the youth - everyone had a solution set that recorded how to resolve problems. That was what Vati thought.

If a large change happened in the world that these solutions could not handle, then it wouldn't be strange to take up a pen and rewrite that person's solution set.

People were beings that could change. Hadn't it been humans itself who described themselves in that manner?

However.....

"I see, all of the problems troubling you can be grouped in that category. It's an extremely ordinary problem, and an eternal question."

After all, what were people's hearts anyway, and what were the so-called personalities?

The floating clouds made the moonlight become weaker, and the cat's body became hazy.

The black cat was slowly engulfed in darkness, and only the two eyes and the gem on its forehead gave off light to prove their existence.

It really seemed like it had three eyes.

The three eyes gazed at Vati. They elicited the doubts in Vati's heart, and commented on those problems.

"Regarding that question, I think the Zero Territory will let you experience an unreserved, explicit answer. But, yes, that's true..... maybe that answer is just reflection brought about by accumulation of experience, and it's disguising the truth, so you have no way of completely denying this answer. Even if I I tell you that what you're chasing after is and answer in the gaps between reality, it only sounds like rhetoric."

That was true.

The Zero Territory space would forcefully expose the human thoughts outside of this world, and uncover the desires hidden in the depths of human consciousness, making them into reality. The uncovered human desires were always irrational, and would quickly lead to self-ruin.

However, irrational desires were always motives for action.

Humans were beings that would chase after things that they definitely couldn't obtain as they lived. People lived like that, and everyone did that, whether they noticed this fact or not.

The Zero Territory would expose those desires, making humans self-conscious, and turning them to despair. In that area where flesh had no meaning, it would materialize whatever contradiction was at the root of the person's desire, and take away their life for it.

However, there were also people who didn't die.

Even if the contradictions of their own desires were before them , if they didn't fear, they didn't falter, they didn't dread, and greedily pursued their desires.

The people who could do this kind of thing could obtain strength in the Zero Territory, and take form. The world Vati had originally existed in had called these kinds of people abnormals, and Vati was a weapon that had been created to get rid of these abnormals.

A nano-celluloid autonomous weapon that relied on the substance that could give form to the Zero Territory, and at the same kind was the source of the abnormals' strength - Aurora Particles - as energy in order to impair the abnormals' strength - that was Vati.

Vati's original mission was to eliminate the two abnormals who had created and who maintained the moving cities that wandered this deserted world - Airen and Saya.

Her mission definitely wasn't to observe the humans of this world.

Liberating Vati's master from this world was also related to her duty of eliminating those two abnormals.

Liberating her master who had willed that decision was quite important to Vati as a Nano-celluloid interface.

However, Vati still hadn't executed that mission yet.

"Can you get the answer by doing that?"

"Regardless of whether I can obtain the answer, the end will not change."

"You won't bring personal relationships into your work? This situation that entwines you and I was originally formed by a personal relationship right?"

"Are you saying there are other things that I can do? No, you are not my master, so I can't listen to your orders."

"Meaning that the fact that you're a machine will not change?"

"Yes."

"Even if that's the final key to release you from the shackles of being a machine?"

"Yes."

"Even if you clearly know that you have almost no effect on what you're chasing after - the functionality of a human being? Using the humans that you know as a benchmark, the humans here are already unsatisfactory for your requirements. But, you're still chasing after humans in this place."

"....."

"Even like that, you still won't change your rules?"

"I won't change them."

"Why?"

"Humans live as humans from the very beginning, and their functions are about the same. I am a machine. Just like how an insect will be an insect until the end, and a flower will be a flower until the end, I as a machine will exist on as a machine."

"Meaning that you can define humans without physical means?
"

"No, I am just describing the birth of a fixed representation conferred at the moment an organism is born."

"......You're really stubborn - that's a fact that will be hard to change."

"Do you understand?"

"Nn, I understand something, which is that discussing with you has no meaning."

"Then....."

"Nn, goodbye."

If the other party planned on continuing the conversation, Vati had thought of eliminating it. Maybe she had seen through Vati's actions, or she was similar to Vati to some degree. She had carried out a malicious game just for her own curiosity.

That was a so-called alchemist.

People whose abilities and techniques ran amok according to their desires.

"Hey, your very first master belonged to the group of alchemists , but your current master was only called an alchemist. You know that fact. Just using that theory of changing experiences, you can't explain that difference, right?"

"Shut up!"

The words naturally ran through Vati's chest, barreled through her throat, and then shot out from her mouth.

Vati didn't know what had happened to herself.

She hadn't retaliated against the black cat who continued to give off malice and who had crossed the line..... That hadn't happened, but if she did, she wouldn't have to yell.

And other than her throat, she hadn't taken any action against the black cat.

Vati couldn't do anything, as if there were problems in her acting systems. It felt like her voice had been wrung out of her throat, but this hadn't actually happened in reality. The thoughts that shot out at the speed of light hadn't slowed down to form words at the speed of sound, but had been released directly at lightspeed.

Her body only tried to get close to the black cat.

But, her body didn't move following Vati's wishes. It passed by the tree that the black cat sat on, and moved in front of the man beside her.

"Uwah!"

In front of Vati, the short man was looking over with a surprised expression. Vati ignored his incredulous reaction, turning her head to look at the tree she had just passed.

When her head rose and she looked upwards, the black cat had already disappeared.

When had he gotten dazed.....

"Uwah!"

Before he realized it, Formed inadvertently let out a cry.

At some time, Vati Len's face had drawn close before him. Her beautiful expressionless face came close, close as if she wanted to press her face against his.

Her face suddenly appearing in front of him undoubtedly gave Formed a big surprise, but this wasn't the only reason he cried out.

Vati who looked expressionless seemed like her eyes, cheeks, and mouth were pulled slightly taut.

No, he couldn't see through that subtle expression that moment relying only on the moonlight.

In that moment, something was released form her expressionless face - some similar thought made Formed have that kind of thought, and also made him cry out.

A thought - had he truly just felt an emotion filled with feeling? Once he came to his senses, the answer became ambiguous. Maybe he had just been surprised by Vati suddenly appearing before him.

But in that moment, her deadpan face seemed to hold some intense emotion completely different from that expression. Moreover, the weight of that emotion firmly lodged itself in Formed's memories.

".....S.....Sorry."

Even if Formed had cried out, she still didn't mind, but just stood before him.

As if he hadn't cried out, she moved her gaze from him, and turned back around to look at the tree.

The awkward atmosphere made Formed also look over there.

The moon that seemed to loom heavily over the night still floated there, as before. Though some floating wisps of cloud had weakened the moonlight, it still didn't change that scene.

The tree illuminated by the moonlight was still there. The tree branches were black in the darkness, as if only their shadows had been captured.

It looked as if cracks had appeared on the moon.

"Ah....."

Formed thought of it.

The cat wasn't there.

He had passed by Vati, and when he noticed that the sound of footsteps had disappeared and turned around, she had been looking at the moon with her head raised. She was definitely looking at the cat sitting on the tree.

That cat was no longer there.

No, since the moment he had noticed the cat, it seemed that not much time had passed, and even if he had been in a daze, not much time could possibly have passed.

Then, was the thing about a cat sitting on a tree branch just a figment of his imagination?

In that case, was Vati currently raising her head to look at the sky in order to search for something?

"There's no cat.....?"

Formed couldn't judge from her position whether Vati was looking at the moon or the tree. A question naturally dropped from his mouth.

Vati who looked at the moon without moving a muscle swayed her arms slightly, and then turned around to look at Formed.

What was there was probably the usual her.

Formed didn't know her usual appearance. But as the information he had looked up on her indicated, this should be her normal expression.

Because on the register stored in the Student Council, there was a photo attached with the exact same expression.

"I've acted shamefully."

"Ah, no....."

The sudden apology made Formed feel confused.

What reason did she have to apologize? The cat had disappeared. It might have disappeared. That was all that had happened.

"The cat escaped. Is it a cat that senpai recognizes?"

"Uh, no, it's not like that. Right, it escaped."

When had it escaped? Had he not seen it? Had it escaped while he was in a daze? It seemed to be a single black cat, so maybe it had blended into the color of the night and he hadn't noticed.

He could understand if he thought about it this way.

"Really?"

The feeling that his pondering was interrupted made Formed feel very uncomfortable. Things were just like that. The fact that the cat wasn't here didn't have any significance, and Formed didn't need to concern himself with that matter.

Why was she next to Formed?

She had just been in another direction raising her head to look at the cat sitting on the tree, but in the next moment she had come right in front of Formed.

If she were a Military Artist, then she could possibly make that movement. Since there hadn't been any sound, maybe that meant she was an expert.

Vati Len should be a normal person. Had she lied about her skills? No, if a Military Artist didn't want to use his strength as a Military Artist, they could stay as a normal general studies student . Just like Layfon Alseif had been a general studies student at the start, that kind of action was permitted.

In that case, did it mean she was that kind of person?

But, if it were like that, why had she hidden her Military Arts ability and stayed in general studies? Formed began caring about that question.

Perhaps the disturbance Formed felt was intuition he had sensed as a policeman - he wanted to consider that possibility.

What was Vati Len's story?

"....."

Had his look revealed his thoughts?

Vati looked at Formed. A tension assaulted him, as if his chest were being stabbed.

Formed seemed to feel scared by her expressionless face. Was this something frightening about her? Because she was expressionless, he was unable to see through her thoughts. Because he was unable to see through her thoughts, he thought that he might have been seen through? Her expressionless face made Formed feel that kind of uncomfortable sensation.

Formed didn't have any evidence at all, and it wasn't even a fact that any crime had happened. The dangerous air he felt from Vati's body was just a hunch, and he couldn't arrest anyone just relying on that hunch.

Just by standing in front of her, his feelings were on the edge of losing control. Maybe that was also an effect of that expressionless face.

Vati opened her mouth.

Formed secretly prepared his heart, as if worrying that something would fly out of her mouth.

"Then, I have something I would like to ask senpai."

"Nn.....?"

"Senpai, are you studying Agriculture?"

"Uh, yeah..... Do you recognize me?"

"Because senpai is very famous. Senpai also works at the City Police, right?"

"Uh, I see."

Indeed, perhaps there were many people who knew Formed from stories about his police work. Even if a first-year student recognized him, it wasn't that strange

"Then, you wanted to ask me a question?"

"Yes."

Suddenly, in this kind of place..... This abnormal situation added to the disturbance he felt in his heart, making Formed raise his alertness.

".....Has Senpai ever performed genetic engineering to create new livestock?"

"Nn? Ah, I have done such a thing."

What Agriculture students did was research how to create an environment that could help manage livestock efficiently, or create livestock suitable for the city's environment.

Formed had done such things. In the six years he had been here, he had created many new lives.

"The lives you create couldn't be exactly the same as you thought every time, right?"

"Ah, that-"

It was indeed true.

Even now, Formed had areas he wasn't skilled at. Sometimes he would be unable to reach his expected target such as making the livestock suited to the environment, or simply a problem of the taste of the products when the livestock was turned into edible meat.

"That's happened before."

Recalling his memories of failure wasn't a happy thing. Formed's tone when he replied naturally became heavier.

"At the time, how did Senpai handle those lives?"

"Nn?"

"Did senpai dispose of the failed lives?"

"......I would."

Vati was still expressionless. Formed didn't know what kinds of feelings she had raised that question with. For the most part, she

could be feeling disgust, and there were also people that said lives shouldn't be treated so casually.

In the moving city, that was how survival was - Regardless of whether one had noticed that fact or noticed but was unable to accept it, either way the people who felt this way wouldn't disappear.

However, survival meant eating, and eating meant killing. This was irrelevant to the animals or plants that were killed, because both sides undoubtedly lived their life to extend prolong their species.

Moreover, the humans that survived in the moving city had to create edible lives that were suited to the city's environment, as well as maintain their lives.

The city didn't have any useless space..... No animal existed that was unrelated to any other life or human.

"If it had another use, sometimes I would send it somewhere else. But for the most part they died."

After making that remark, Formed looked at Vati.

"So?"

Formed didn't make a sound, but his eyes asked a question.

So? What are you thinking after asking that kind of thing?

Or, was she troubled over her own path?

Thinking about this from the most appropriate angle, that was the case. Formed was also like this. Formed had come to the Academy City in order to expand his knowledge as a researcher. He hadn't planned on becoming a policeman.

However, it was a trivial matter that had made him become a policeman.

Can you go on like this - He had frequently heard the people around him saying this.

However, he succeeded in doing it. Not only that, he had also felt that something about the City Police job was worth the effort.

But, he was unable to keep following both roads forever.

Formed was currently at a fork in the road.

Vati before him might also be in that kind of situation. Maybe she had also come to the Academy City for some goal, but noticed something new here.

Maybe it was because the new thing she had noticed was Agriculture, so she had raised that question after noticing Formed.

"Why do you ask that question?"

"When you dispose of lives that didn't reach expectations, do you feel anything?"

"....."

Was Vati also one who felt disgusted at taking lives of animals? Thinking of this, Formed couldn't help but have a disappointed feeling. Was it unrelated to choosing a path or anything like that, and just venting her disgust on Formed who had appeared before her - was she just that kind of person?

"I do feel bad. But, I don't plan on letting that feeling stop myself. Because I believe that the sin of wasting lives can only be atoned for after reaching my goals."

"Using lives as stepping stones?"

"I don't know how I'll be thought about for it, and maybe I'll be hated. But, I can't do anything about that matter."

Yes, he couldn't do anything.

"My City Police job is also like that. Even if I catch the criminal, the ones who have been harmed by the criminal or the objects that are destroyed never get returned to normal. In that kind of situation, what can the police do for the victim? Nothing at all. Catching the criminal might keep other victims from being harmed . But, things that are lost won't return."

In that situation, maybe sadness, hate, or anger would be birthed in the victim's heart - facing those negative emotions, what could the police do?

"I can't do anything at all. All the police can give is an opportunity to end things. Arresting the criminal is just wrapping things up. That is all the victim can think, and take it as an opportunity to move forward."

The important part was moving forward.

"Are the failed lives that you disposed of also victims?"

"......Maybe. However, that's a gray area of ethics that society can't swallow. Regardless of whether you make legal reprisals for the victim or meaninglessly slaughter many lives, that's the same."

Regardless of the choice, there would be people who would explain with logic, but it was unable to make people agree emotionally.

"I see....."

Vati muttered this, and her tone didn't have an atmosphere of contempt for Formed's logic. Then, how did she view this matter? Formed couldn't judge Vati's emotions from her expressionless face.

Formed could only look at her, feeling puzzled.

"Thank you senpai, your words were extremely valuable."

"Oh, uh....."

Vati thanked him, but Formed still felt confused.

"Can you solve your uncertainty like this?"

"I don't know. But, I learned something that I would like to know."

"Really?"

Formed couldn't understand the meaning.

"Thank you, senpai."

Vati thanked him once again, and then turned around and left. Formed didn't have any reason to remain here. Gazing at Vati's back and watching her leave, Formed scratched his head and also set foot towards home.

The feeling of a disturbance still lingered in his heart.

"Ah, this is fine."

In the end, there were no signs at all that that feeling was the harbinger of any crimes.

Maybe it was just a figment of his imagination. Maybe it was just because he had been very troubled by things recently, so he had made some kind of mistake.

Forme didn't know what Vati had obtained from his response. However, the answer she had gotten from that question was definitely one that a student should have obtained. Studying, getting lost, and finding a path. Students repeated that process.

"I should also be choosing a side soon."

Formed walked while murmuring to himself. Did he want to become a policeman or a researcher? Though he could do both when he was a student, in the world of adults he probably wouldn't be able to.

"......What should I do?"

Not asking it of anyone in particular, Formed scratched his head while moving forward.

Other than this, one other thing emerged in his brain.

The expression Vati had showed at that time when she had come in front of Formed still lingered in his mind.

She seemed expressionless but also not expressionless. A subtle change had appeared in her expression, and some kind of sentiment had been released.

As he walked, Formed had a thought - Maybe she was crying at the time.

"......How could that be."

Behind that expressionless face, was Vati unable to express her emotions? Was she chasing after a way to express her emotions, rather than a path for herself?

"Am I thinking too much?"

He couldn't connect that emotionless expression which had almost broken but at the same time hadn't broken with the question she had asked of Formed.

Formed looked at the sky. The moon was so close, but right now it was blocked by the clouds and almost couldn't be seen.

"Ah, even so, I'll have to decide someday."

It was almost time to stop patrolling - Formed began thinking about this as he gazed at the moon.

Translation Notes and References

1. ↑ The level of love that Meishen has.
2. ↑ The Dites she received from Zuellni.
3. ↑ Harley almost uses both of her names as discussed before.
4. ↑ Whether she's a Psychokinesist or a normal person.
5. ↑ Vati
6. ↑ The name of the person speaking through the cat.